

A Tale of Two Diplomats: George S. Messersmith and Charles H. Sherrill on Proposed American Participation in the 1936 Olympics*

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The 1936 Berlin Olympics remains one of the most intensively studied Olympiads in modern history. The mystique of the Jesse Owens controversy, Hitler's boast of "Aryan Supremacy" and the blatant program of anti-Semitism in German social and sporting life during the pre-Olympic years have attracted the attention of numerous historians.¹ Much of this research has addressed American reaction to Nazi discrimination against German-Jewish athletes.² Such athletes became subject to extensive restrictive legislation in the wake of Hitler's rise to supreme power in January 1933. During the course of the ensuing three years, heated discussion took place in the United States concerning the merit of abstaining from participation in the Olympics as a form of protest. Many public interest groups lobbied the American Olympic Committee and its President, Avery Brundage, seeking a boycott of the festival.

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1. See Hajo Bemetz, "The Role of Jewish Sportsmen During the Olympic Games in 1936," in U. Simri, ed., *Physical Education and Sports in the Jewish History and Culture* (Netanya: Wingate Institute for Physical Education, 1973), 88-113; Duff Hart-Davis, *Hitler's Games: The 1936 Olympics* (London: Century Hutchinson, 1986); Judith Holmes, *Olympiad 1936-Blaze of Glory for Hitler's Reich* (New York: Ballantyne Books, 1971); Ian Jobling, "Australia at the 1936 Olympics: Issues and Attitudes," *Canadian Journal of History of Sport and Physical Education* 13 (May, 1982): 18-27; David Kass, "The Issue of Racism at the 1936 Olympics," *Journal of Sport History* 3 (Winter, 1976): 223-235; Bruce Kidd, "Canadian Opposition to the 1936 Olympics in Germany," *Canadian Journal of History of Sport and Physical Education* 9 (December, 1978): 20-40; Bruce Kidd, "The Popular Front and the 1936 Olympics," *ibid.*, 11 (May, 1980): 1-18; Arnd Krüger, "Fair Play for American Athletes: A Study in Anti-Semitism," *ibid.*, 9 (May, 1978): 42-57; Arnd Krüger, "The 1936 Olympic Games-Berlin," in Peter Graham and Horst Ueberhorst, eds., *The Modern Olympics* (Cornwall N.Y.: Leisure Press, 1976); Richard Mandell, *The Nazi Olympics* (New York: Macmillan, 1971).

2. See Allen Guttmann, *The Games Must Go On: Avery Brundage and the Olympic Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984); Moshe Gottlieb, "The American Controversy over the Olympic Games," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 61 (March, 1972): 181-213; Carolyn Marvin, "Avery Brundage and American Participation in the 1936 Olympics," *Journal of American Studies* 16 (April, 1982): 81-106; David Wiggins, "The 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin: The Response of America's Black Press," *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport* 54 (September, 1983): 278-292.

Discussion of the issue of participation at the American amateur sport level, as well as events preceding America's decision to compete (December 1935),³ has received the majority of scholarly attention. Recently, George Eisen completed an investigation of the stance adopted by American diplomatic and consular officials stationed in Germany during the 1933-1936 period. Focusing on a limited number of reports drafted by Ambassador William E. Dodd, Consul General George S. Messersmith, and Consul Raymond H. Geist, Eisen highlighted the reservations that these representatives harboured towards American participation.⁴

New evidence indicates that Consul General Messersmith devoted an abundance of energy and time to investigation and documentation of developments in Germany regarding the plight of German-Jewish athletes. Eisen restricted his treatment of Messersmith's involvement to two reports directed to Secretary of State Cordell Hull (November 28, 1933; November 15, 1935).⁵ However, Messersmith's personal papers reveal the intense interest and concern that he displayed in regard to the issue of participation. Messersmith wrote numerous dispatches to various officials at the State Department seeking governmental or departmental action.

Messersmith's behind-the-scenes involvement in the participation controversy provides a fascinating contrast to the high-profile role played by a former diplomat, whose association with the J.O.C. dictated a rather different stand. Brigadier-General Charles Hitchcock Sherrill, the former American minister to Argentina (1909-1911) and Ambassador to Turkey (1932-1933), had served as a representative to the I.O.C. since 1922. His attitude towards the discrimination paralleled the position adopted by Brundage. Sherrill pressured the Germans into promising to abide by all Olympic statutes, and also to guarantee the equal rights of German-Jewish athletes. However, once this promise was obtained, Sherrill publicly ignored all indication that the Germans were failing to honour their pledges. While Messersmith toiled in Germany (and later following his transfer to Vienna in 1934 in Austria) gathering critical information and providing reports to the State Department concerning the Jewish situation, Sherrill vociferously campaigned for the support of an American Olympic entry.

The intent of this paper is to examine the differing viewpoints of Messersmith and Sherrill. Messersmith's consular position in Berlin and Sherrill's diplomatic experience and part-time Paris residency support that both were aware of the volatile situation in Nazi Germany. Although Sherrill was not an active

3. The American Olympic Committee and the Amateur Athletic Union of the United States controlled American participation in the Olympic Games. The A.O.C. voted for participation in September, 1934. In December, 1935, the A.A.U. in a narrow vote opted to support the A.O.C. and the American Olympic Team.

4. See George Eisen. "The Voices of Sanity: American Diplomatic Reports from the 1936 Berlin Olympiad," *Journal of Sport History* 11 (Winter, 1984): 56-77.

5. Although some of Eisen's footnotes are incorrect, an analysis of these documents indicates that Eisen used material from both sources. Some of the material that he cited in a 1935 letter actually is contained in a 1933 report. See Letter, Messersmith to Cordell Hull, November 28, 1933, No. 1766 862.4063 Olympic Games/1GC, Diplomatic Branch, National Archives; Messersmith to Hull, November 15, 1935, Document No. 613. The George S. Messersmith Papers 1932-1946, University Library, University of Delaware. Hereafter cited as *MP*.

foreign diplomat during the 1934-1936 period, there remains little doubt that he fancied the diplomat/negotiator role that he fulfilled for both the I.O.C. and A.O.C. during the Olympic debate. The actions of Sherrill and the A.O.C. leaders who supported participation infuriated Messersmith. He felt that deliberate ignorance of the true Olympic situation represented not only a grave failure on the part of the American Olympic executives, but also a betrayal of the trust of the American people.⁶ Sherrill's deteriorating interest in the predicament of the German-Jewish athlete, and Messersmith's investigative persistence require critical analysis, as their divergent views accurately reflect the polarization of American society in response to the issue of proposed U.S. participation in Berlin.

A March 1935 Gallup poll revealed that 43% of the American public favoured a boycott of the Berlin Games.⁷ Although Messersmith approached the issue of participation in terms of its political and diplomatic impact, he shared the concerns of private citizens, politicians, various newspaper columnists and public interest groups that campaigned for an American boycott. These concerns included a fear for the safety of competing American athletes, the political exploitation of the Olympic movement by the Nazi hierarchy, the reprehensible treatment of the German-Jewish sport and general populations, and the apparent indifference to the discrimination displayed by sport leaders such as Sherrill and Brundage.

Naturally, major sport organizations such as the N.C.A.A. and Y.M.C.A. supported the A.O.C.'s pro-participation stance as they did not wish to see the dreams of a number of their members dashed by an American withdrawal. Many sport groups favoured participation because of concern for the impact of a boycott on the Olympic movement. Undoubtedly, this fear operated as a motivational force for Sherrill throughout the controversy. Private citizens, public interest groups, and the section of America's media that supported participation also maintained that sport should be removed from politics, and that domestic German problems had no relation to American sportsmen. These beliefs were espoused frequently by Sherrill during the 1933-1936 period. Messersmith and Sherrill represented spokesmen for these opposing visions of the Berlin Olympic Games (albeit the views of the Consul General remained restricted to confidential State Department communiqués); on the one hand, the faction which valued the Olympic movement, but could not rationalize the celebration of Olympism in Berlin in light of apparent violations of the Olympic ideals, and on the other, those who believed that the Olympic Games belong to the athletes of the world and therefore should not be subject to political interference and ideologies.

George Strausser Messersmith was born on October 3, 1883 in Fleetwood,

6. See Messersmith to William Phillips (Undersecretary of State), August 12, 1935, *MP* Document No. 546; Messersmith to James C. Dunn (Chief-Division of Western European Affairs), October 17, 1935, *MP*, Document No. 596; Messersmith to Dunn, October 21, 1935, *MP* Document No. 601; Messersmith to Hull, November 15, 1935 *MP*, Document No. 613.

7. Guttman, *The Games Must Go On*, 72.

Pennsylvania. Following a two year study period at Kutztown State Normal School, Messersmith entered the teaching profession. After graduation in 1900, Messersmith was assigned to a one room schoolhouse in Woodside, Delaware. His occupation eventually brought him to Newark, Delaware. Messersmith applied to Delaware College in order to upgrade his education, however, he balked at pursuing the pre-admission remedial work recommended by the faculty committee. Messersmith continued teaching and through his industriousness achieved the position of Vice-President of the state school board. In 1913 Messersmith opted for a career change. Stiller attributes Messersmith's decision to enter the foreign service, in part, to a growing tiredness as a result of his exhaustive battles for school reform in Delaware.⁸

Messersmith entered the Foreign Service in 1914 when he was appointed consul at Fort Erie, Canada. The succeeding eleven years were spent as a consul at Curacao (1916-1919), and Antwerp (1919-1925). In 1925, Messersmith was promoted to the post of Consul General of Belgium and Luxembourg. Following a two year tour of duty as Consul General of Argentina (1928-1930), Messersmith was appointed Consul General in Berlin.⁹ The frequent promotions indicated the reputation that he had established in the Foreign Service, although his ambitiousness disturbed a number of his State Department superiors.¹⁰

Berlin's new Consul General soon established himself as a staunch representative of American ideals. Following the Nazi takeover, some Germans considered Messersmith an "enemy" of the Reich while Ambassador Dodd admitted that Messersmith was regarded as "hostile"¹¹ to the Germans. For example, Messersmith became irked by statements made at a Berlin Rotary Club meeting on November 9, 1933 by two German businessmen who had recently returned from America. They decried the American journalism industry for its "anti-German" and "mendacious" attitude. Messersmith's anger prompted his abrupt departure from the proceedings of this meeting.¹² The episode indicates the uncompromising manner with which Messersmith approached his duties in Germany. His work garnered the President's praise when Roosevelt lauded Messersmith by proclaiming that he "is one of the best men we have in the whole service and I count greatly on his judgment."¹³ Stiller observed that "what made Messersmith special to Roosevelt was the spirit of his analyses rather than their specifics. He was a career man with a progressive outlook, one of the very few who knew right from wrong as the White House understood it." ¹⁴

8. Jesse H. Stiller, George S. Messersmith: *Diplomat of Democracy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 2-6.

9. *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, s.v. "Messersmith, George S."

10. Stiller, *Diplomat of Democracy* 77.

11. William E. Dodd Jr., and Martha Dodd, eds., *Ambassador Dodd's Diary 1933-1938* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1941), 190, 132.

12. *New York Times*, November 10, 1933.

13. Franklin D. Roosevelt to Judge Julian Mack, December 4, 1935. Official File (OF) 720, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library (file note).

14. Stiller, *Diplomat of Democracy*, 83.

Although Sherrill's diplomatic service did not rival Messersmith's in terms of length (Argentina two years, Turkey one year), he too had enjoyed success.¹⁵ Sherrill practised law after obtaining his B.A. (1889), LL.B. (1891) and M.A. (1892) from Yale until 1917. From 1919 to 1931 he served on the governing council of New York University. In 1925, Sherrill established the Department of Fine Arts at the same institution. An accomplished writer, Sherrill was appointed director of the New York University School (Paris) in 1926 and held the post for four years. He had a knowledge of ten languages, and had been decorated by a number of foreign governments. During the period of American involvement in the First World War, Sherrill occupied the position of Adjutant-General for the State of New York, an office that entailed supervision of the draft board.¹⁶

The approaches to the Olympic issue adopted by Sherrill and Messersmith were markedly different. In order to place their views in context, a brief glance at the initial Nazi involvement in the Berlin Games is required. The Nazi rise to political domination of Germany on January 30, 1933 cast a dark shadow over prospective Olympic events of the 1936 Games. Jews were gradually phased out of professions such as teaching, medicine and law.¹⁷ In June 1933, Jewish youths were banned from gymnastic and sport organizations, and denied access to many training facilities. International observers were shocked to learn of Theodor Lewald's removal from the Presidency of the German Olympic Committee in favour of Hitler's choice, Hans von Tschammer und Osten. The purge took place after it became public knowledge that his father had been born a Jew (he later changed his religion).¹⁸

The situation in Germany concerned the I.O.C., and a discussion of the issue was planned for the organization's annual conference in June. As mentioned, Sherrill took a strong stand against the evident discrimination. Before leaving for the Vienna meeting, he told the American public to "rest assured that I shall stoutly maintain the American principle that all citizens are equal under all laws." He stressed that the German Jews must be allowed to compete in Berlin. In reply to those who argued that the German treatment of Jewish citizens was Germany's business, the *New York Times* noted that "General Sherrill rejects the argument that the whole matter is an internal question. He maintains the Olympic Games and its rules cannot be violated by the entertaining nation."¹⁹

15. *National Cyclopaedia & American Biography*. s.v. "Sherrill, Charles H." During his stay in Argentina, Sherrill's persistence resulted in the increase of the annual trade between Argentina and the United States from 47 to 80 million dollars. In less than a year in Istanbul, Sherrill succeeded in elevating the level of American imports to a comparable level with Turkish exports. See *New York Times*, April 16, 1933; He was also credited with reducing the annual growth of opium (acreage), and inspiring a revision of Turkey's harsh capital punishment legislation.

16. *Ibid.*

17. Mandell, *The Nazi Olympics*, 58.

18. Guttman, *The Games Must Go On*, 61. The literature reveals a difference of opinion as to the extent of Lewald's Jewish heritage. In regard to the question, Eisen refers to "a Jewish father." See Eisen, "Voices of Sanity," 64. Mandell notes that Lewald's paternal grandmother was Jewish. See Mandell, *The Nazi Olympics*, 68. However, the fact remains that Lewald was part-jewish.

19. *New York Times*, June 2, 5, 1933.

The last observation is critical, as Sherrill's public posture in relation to the "internal" nature of the problem altered as the participation debate intensified.

Sherrill and his I.O.C. colleagues aired the German-Jewish issue at the June meeting. Realizing the gravity of the situation, the Germans made a "strategic retreat." On June 7, Lewald announced that Germany would adhere to I.O.C. regulations and allow Jewish participation on its team.²⁰ It was also announced that Lewald had been reinstated to the Organizing Committee.²¹ The I.O.C. was noticeably relieved. It had received the assurance demanded from the Germans concerning Jewish participation, and had succeeded in achieving the reinstatement of Lewald, even though his authority had been reduced. Krüger notes that the German Home Office balked at providing any promise of German-Jewish access to the team and that a number of last minute communiqués were required before Lewald could accede to such an I.O.C. demand.²² Sherrill took great pride in obtaining the pledge. In speeches and letters made over the ensuing two years, he continually referred to his "Vienna triumph." In a letter to Rabbi Stephen Wise of New York, Sherrill highlighted his personal involvement in dramatic fashion, concluding:

It was a trying fight. We were six on the Executive Committee, and even my English colleagues thought we ought not to interfere in the internal arrangements of the German team. The Germans yielded slowly-very slowly. First they conceded that the other nations could bring Jews. Then, after the fight was over, telephones [sic] came from Berlin that no publication [sic] should be given to their government's back-down on Jews, but only the vague statement that they agreed to follow our rules . . . Then I went at them hard, insisting that as they had expressly excluded Jews, now they must expressly declare that Jews would not even be excluded from German teams. All sorts of influence was exerted to change my American stand. Finally they yielded because they found that I had lined up the necessary votes.²³

While the I.O.C. interpreted the events in a positive manner, Messersmith initiated his Olympic correspondence to the State Department in a far more cautionary tone. Messersmith wrote Hull that the Nazis were placing an extreme emphasis on sport, and that Jews were barred from competition. Although noting the German claim that Jews would be permitted on their Olympic team, Messersmith stated that this was not the "real intention." He felt that the safety of American Jews in Berlin would not be guaranteed, and that a Berlin site invited racial problems during the festival. It was Messersmith's

20. The fact that the Germans were willing to make a pledge did not necessarily mean that they intended to honour it. Following the I.O.C. convention, Reich Sport Leader Hans van Tschammer und Osten told an assemblage of German sport officials that, "You are probably astonished by the decision in Vienna, but we had to consider the foreign political situation." Before the same group van Tschammer und Osten noted that the "racial cleansing" of German sport clubs was progressing. See Mandell, *The Nazi Olympics*, 71.

21. *Official Bulletin of the International Olympic Committee*. (Lausanne, September 1933). 9, Avery Brundage Collection (Hereafter cited as A.B.C.), Box 75, D.B. Weldon Library, University of Western Ontario (microfilm).

22. Krüger, "The 1936 Olympics-Berlin," 169.

23. "Preserve the Olympic Ideal: A Statement of the Case Against American Participation in the Olympic Games at Berlin" (New York: Fair Play Committee in Sports, 1935), 2. President's Personal File (PPF) 879, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.

belief that the American Olympic Committee would not approve of participation in such an atmosphere.²⁴

Eisen raised the question whether diplomatic correspondence from individuals such as Dodd, Messersmith and Geist resulted from personal initiative or because the American government actively requested information. In the case of Messersmith the answer is unquestionably the former. In the three years that he had provided Olympic situation updates, the Consul General received only one reply that acknowledged the athletic situation.²⁵ Messersmith quite rightly interpreted the Olympic controversy and Jewish discrimination as political situations that might endanger American interests (not to mention the U.S. athletes).²⁶ As will be seen he was not necessarily motivated by a desire to prevent participation, but felt that it was necessary that accurate information should be in the hands of those A.O.C. and A.A.U. members determining participation.²⁷

Whereas German pledges had predominantly satisfied I.O.C. board members, the German Olympic situation still concerned many A.A.U. and A.O.C. members, and it was a major issue at both organizations' annual conventions. These meetings greatly distressed Lewald to the point that he approached Messersmith for information about the discussions.²⁸ Lewald was under enormous pressure to obtain American participation. When Lewald told Messersmith that foreign Jews would be safe in Berlin during the games, the Consul General informed his nervous visitor that he was not aware of the meetings. Messersmith noted that he believed the difficulty American sportsmen were having in reaching a participation decision revolved around the apparent inability of Jewish athletes to qualify for the host nation's team. Messersmith summarized the situation in his report to Hull by noting that the A.O.C.:

. . . knew that the Jewish athletes in Germany were being discriminated against in a wholesale and absolutely definite manner and were not given an opportunity to train nor participate and that this extended not only to preparations for the Olympic Games in Berlin, but also for sport competitions within the country with

24. Messersmith to Hull, June 17, 1933, *MP*, Document No. 195.

25. Dunn to Messersmith, November 20, 1935 *MP*, Document No. 616.

26. The Foreign Service of the United States is divided into the Diplomatic (Ambassadorial) and Consular services. Under direction of the Secretary of State these two branches. " . . . afford those faculties of perception, of observation and of speech which give to the Department of State, and through it to the President, the power of intelligent decision and of action in matters involving American interests at places remote from our frontiers." In addition, a consular official such as Messersmith is entrusted to, . . . " promote all rightful interests of American citizens and maintain personal contact with local officials, business men, and others of the country in which he is stationed, with a view to gathering information and reporting commercial and political developments." See Tracy Hollingsworth Lay, *The Foreign Service of the United States* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1925), 124, 131-132.

27. See Messersmith to Jay P. Moffat (Chief-Division of Western European Affairs-succeeded by James C. Dunn), October 18, 1934, *MP*, Document No. 429; Messersmith to Phillips, August 27, 1935, *MP*, Document No. 558; Messersmith to Dunn, October 17, 1935, *MP*, Document No. 596; Messersmith to Hull, November 15, 1935, *MP*, Document No. 613; Messersmith to Hull, November 28, 1933, No. 1766 862. 4063 Olympic Games/1GC, Diplomatic Branch, National Archives.

28. Messersmith to Hull, November 28, 1933, No. 1766 862.4063 Olympic Games/1GC, Diplomatic Branch, National Archives.

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.²⁹

Prior to the A.O.C.'s passage of a resolution making American participation conditional upon an improvement in the situation, Lewald sent a cable to the group which reiterated the German pledges made in Vienna. Messersmith was aware of the cable, but cautioned Hull that any promise that Jews were eligible for training and participation could not be believed since Lewald possessed no independent authority. He felt that the Germans might attempt to mollify observers by allowing the participation of a minimal number of Jews, but the concession would only disguise the actual discrimination. Stressing that the A.O.C. must receive accurate information, Messersmith warned Hull of a dangerous precedent that might be established if the A.O.C. was improperly informed. From his consular experience Messersmith noted that "it is eventually dangerous to understanding and good relations that official or unofficial organizations in any country gather the impression that others are so naive that the wool can be pulled over their eyes whenever the circumstances may make it expedient."³⁰

Undoubtedly, one of Messersmith's major concerns was that the A.O.C. members should be fully aware of the German-Jewish situation before committing American athletes to participation. At the end of 1933 the issue of participation was far from settled as the A.O.C. and A.A.U. were both on record with resolutions that expressed the definite possibility that American athletes might not travel to Berlin.

In February 1934, Messersmith was appointed Minister to Uruguay. However, before he assumed his new duties, George H. Earle resigned the ministerial post in Austria. The Austrian position was one that demanded an individual intimately familiar with the European situation and its unsettled political climate. Charles C. Burlingham, a New York lawyer and Presidential advisor on federal judicial appointments, told Roosevelt one week before Messersmith was appointed to Vienna that America needed a "strong man" in Austria.³¹ He was concerned for the welfare of his three grandchildren in Vienna, and expressed confidence in Messersmith's abilities based on his performance in the trying Berlin setting. He felt that Messersmith's talents could be better used in Austria rather than Uruguay. Burlingham must have been relieved when the *Times* announced Messersmith's promotion to the Vienna diplomatic post on March 21. The *Times* editors supported the appointment:

It was a clear case of promoting special talent and experience, with peculiar fitness for the work assigned. It was also a case of illustrating the advantages of our comparatively new system under which men of proved ability may pass from the consular to the diplomatic service.³²

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. Charles C. Burlingham to Franklin D. Roosevelt, March 14, 1934, OF 896, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.

32. *New York Times*, March 23, 1934.

However, the revelation that Messersmith was to receive the Austrian position met with a different reception in Germany. The *Times* reported that the cancellation of Messersmith's transfer and his subsequent re-assignment to Vienna, "has greatly interested German official circles, in which it is not too much to say it has aroused conflicting sentiments." Although the Germans were gratified that a man such as Messersmith, who was conversant with German viewpoints, would be serving in Vienna, they were aware of his hard-nosed and uncompromising work ethic. He had proved to be a difficult man to deal with, and the Germans were aware of his hostility towards National Socialist policy. Concerning the transfer the Germans may have concluded that it was better to deal with Messersmith in Vienna, than in Berlin. The *Times* noted in conclusion that "American business in Germany will miss him and perhaps German sighs over his approaching departure will not be over deep."³³ Messersmith's transfer did nothing to reduce his concern over the Olympic issue. In fact, his distance from the situation may have frustrated him. He maintained his German contacts, and during the ensuing two years broadened the number of his State Department contacts pertaining to the Olympic matter.³⁴

The Germans were very concerned with America's hesitation to commit its athletes to Berlin. In an interview with *Times* correspondent Herbert Matthews following the I.O.C. Executive Commission meeting held in Brussels on May 8, 1934, Theodor Lewald attempted to convince American observers of the "true" German situation. After repeating the pledges made in Vienna, Lewald admitted that a number of American sport leaders were concerned about the German guarantee regarding Jewish participation on the German team. That promise read that "as a principle German Jews shall not be excluded from German Teams of the XIth Olympiad."³⁵ Lewald observed that during the past year:

... there has been much discussion about the phrase 'in principle'. Some critics accuse Germany of seeking to evade her commitment by stretching the meaning of that phrase.

I want to say first that Germany has kept and will continue to keep that promise. Secondly, that there are and will be no qualifications or restrictions of any kind upon the admission of Jewish athletes to the German Olympic team.³⁶

As with all German promises in this regard, Lewald's words represented a bold-faced lie. Jews were excluded from all clubs eligible for national championship meets, and some were forced to practice in cow pastures because of restrictions placed on the use of training facilities.³⁷

Although at first glance this interview was of little significance, especially

33. *New York Times*, March 25, 1934.

34. Messersmith wrote to Jay Pierrepont Moffat, the Chief of Western European Affairs until the Spring of 1935, his successor James Clement Dunn, and Undersecretary of State William Phillips.

35. *Official Bulletin of the International Olympic Committee*, (Lausanne, September 1933). 9, A.B.C. Box 75.

36. *New York Times*, May 9, 1934.

37. *New York Post*, October 22, 1935

since bogus German pledges were made repeatedly during the pre-Olympic years, the manner in which the interview was arranged is of critical interest. In a letter to Brundage, Sherrill explained that the meeting had been staged. Confident of a favourable I.O.C. outlook on the matter of German preparations Sherrill wrote:

I believe that I might almost dare today to send you the telegram you request in your letter of April 17th about how the Committee feels about Germany's compliance with the agreement I secured from them last June in Vienna. A very detailed statement was given our Exec. Com. [Executive Committee] by Lewald and Diem. To make assurance doubly sure, I had up from the Paris office of the 'N.Y. Times' (property of Mr. Ochs, a Jew) their Herb Matthews, and, after the close of the Ex. Com.'s afternoon session, I put him with Lewald and Diem into another room and let him question them to his heart's content. What he reports ought to satisfy American Jewry.³⁸

Sherrill's action indicates that he was devoutly committed to American participation. The concern over the "hideous"³⁹ treatment of the Jewish athlete had been surpassed by the perceived importance of the Olympic movement. Messersmith wrote the State Department on October 18th that:

I had the chance to talk with General Sherrill at Ambassador Morris' house in Brussels some months ago. It was quite clear then that General Sherrill was so much interested in having us participate that he would be willing to accept what he knew to be hollow statements and promises.⁴⁰

Brundage and Sherrill agreed that American participation, and the unhindered continuance of the Olympic movement were more important than the German-Jewish situation. Although the apparent Brundage-Sherrill cover-up conspiracy would not enrage Messersmith until the following autumn, it was cause for some consternation. Claiming that he "was not fighting any battles for Jews or any other race or class," Messersmith stated that the spirit of Olympism could not exist in Nazi Germany. At this point Messersmith obviously felt that his best course of action was to stress the predicament of the American citizenry. If Brundage and Sherrill neglected to provide the A.O.C. with accurate information, perhaps the State Department could enter the situation. In respect to the lack of action by the A.O.C. leader and his I.O.C. ally, Messersmith concluded:

it does give me great concern that the decent worthwhile sport loving people in the United States should be told that things are so when they are not so, and that they should be brought in to support an action which they do not approve of. I think our decent people at home have a right to the facts.⁴¹

The State Department continued to ignore Messersmith's pleas. For those persons opposing participation in the U.S., the A.A.U. represented the next avenue of protest.

Following the September 1934 A.O.C. decision to support participation, all

38. Sherrill to Brundage, May 9, 1934, A.B.C. Box 63, Square brackets mine

39. *New York Times*, December 1, 1933.

40. Messersmith to Moffat, October 18, 1934, *MP*, Document No. 429.

41. *Ibid.*

eyes turned to the upcoming A.A.U. meeting scheduled for December. A.A.U. approval was also required as I.O.C. certification regulations required the signature of an A.O.C. and A.A.U. representative on each athlete's eligibility form.⁴² The A. A.U. was also the national sport governing body of track and field, and supplied significant moral and financial support to the American Olympic entry. The *Times* recognized the importance of the A.A.U. support. A staff writer noted that "American participation in Germany without the A.A.U. would be akin to trying to run a horse race without a horse. The jockey might go the distance but not very well."⁴³ Although Brundage felt that the A.A.U. was morally obligated to fall in line with the A.O.C., the A.A.U. deferred any decision at the 1934 convention. At the end of 1934 the situation was still unsettled.

The year 1935 proved to be the most turbulent period of debate on the question of American participation. Brundage and Sherrill not only faced opposition from a number of politicians, including New York Representative Emanuel Celler, but also A.A.U. President Jeremiah T. Mahoney. A former Olympian, Mahoney had adopted in July, 1935 a vigorous pro-boycott stand. From that point on, Mahoney was a thorn in the sides of the participation supporters. Although Mahoney was rallying significant support for a showdown vote at the December A.A.U. convention, Brundage surmised that a Jewish participant on the German team would sway public opinion. He had been told by A.O.C. colleague Gustavus T. Kirby that this type of development would be enough to turn the tide of battle in favour of the participation supporters.⁴⁴

To guarantee this eventuality, Sherrill undertook a mission to Germany to obtain the inclusion of a Jew on the German team. His efforts were directed towards one of the more qualified Jewish athletes, fencer Helene Mayer, who had captured a gold medal at the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics. Sherrill met with Hitler on August 24th to persuade the German leader of the need to include a Jew on the team to assist the efforts of those Americans who were attempting to secure participation. Hitler replied that he was not aware of the Vienna pledge, and that Jewish participation on the German team was not possible. To Sherrill's veiled threat⁴⁵ of removing the games from Berlin, Hitler stated that he would sponsor the "purely German Olympic Games."⁴⁶ These disclosures stunned Sherrill, and saddened him because his self-trumpeted triumph of June 1933 had been destroyed during the hour-long session. On August 30th, he wrote a nervous letter to I.O.C. President Henri Baillet-Latour:

42. Krüger, "The 1936 Olympics-Berlin." 172.

43. *New York Times*. September 28, 1934.

44. Gustavus T. Kirby to Brundage, September 12, 1935, A.B.C. Box 29. Although Kirby had originally battled for German concessions, he switched allegiance in 1934. Brundage visited Germany and predictably told the A.O.C. that American participation would be proper. Brundage's report led the A.O.C. to approve participation in September, 1934. It was at this time that Kirby pledged his support to Brundage. He proved to be one of Brundage's most important allies during the turbulent participation debate of 1935.

45. Krüger, "The 1936 Olympics-Berlin." 175. For all intents and purposes the I.O.C. was fully committed, from a logistical standpoint, to a Berlin site following the 1933 Vienna Congress.

46. *Ibid.*, 175. It would appear that Hitler was referring to a festival conducted by German officials. In the same vein, he was likely referring to competition solely featuring German athletes.

I urge you to talk personally with the Führer, and show him the Ministerium des Innern June, 1933 letter you received in Vienna from Berlin about the exclusion of the German Jews from the German 1936 team. You are in for the greatest shock of your entire life. It will be a trying test even for your remarkable tact and savoir faire; and the sooner you meet the situation, the better the hope for your success, instead of a destructive explosion.⁴⁷

This version of the encounter was provided by Hitler's interpreter. However, two recently discovered descriptions of the visit require analysis. Although the letter to Baillet-Latour exposed a definite feeling of agitation, Sherrill's correspondence to Roosevelt's personal secretary refrained from expressing reservations about the meeting. The meeting description was undated, although its content indicates that it was written immediately prior to Sherrill's departure for the Nuremberg Party Rally as Hitler's guest.⁴⁸ Sherrill confided that he was "shocked" by Hitler's Olympic attitude, but refused to be intimidated. In typical Sherrill melodramatic fashion, he told Marguerite LeHand that when Hitler had rebuffed his pleas, he noticed that:

My book "Bismarck and Mussolini" lay before him, and he faced a fine Lembach portrait of Bismarck. It was a last chance, so I went right at him with the question "What Bismarck, master of foreigners' psychology, would do today"? He was polite, but showed nothing. Had my appeal won?—no sign!

Sherrill continued by saying that von Tschammer und Osten had given him a luncheon in Berlin the previous day. The dinner was given because of a direct order from Hitler. Its staging served as an announcement that the Führer agreed to abide by the Vienna pledge. Claiming the victory, Sherrill concluded that "it was dreadful nerve for me to tackle him in his own Munich home, but I am only a private citizen, and he can't eat me."⁴⁹ The fact that the matter was apparently resolved before Sherrill discussed the meeting with Washington indicates that he desired to prevent any undue, and unwanted, governmental concern.

Sherrill also forwarded a six page informal report to Washington concerning his impressions of Hitler.⁵⁰ For the most part, this document avoided discussion of the Olympic controversy, but does reveal that Sherrill was fascinated by Hitler's personage. He described Hitler's modest furnishings, excellent physical condition, and straight-forward manner. Sherrill was almost sickeningly flattering to Hitler, and comically ventured an opinion on one of Hitler's discriminating facial features. Sherrill felt that the Führer's mustache, and its

47. Sherrill to Henri Baillet-Latour, August 30, 1935, as cited in Krüger. "The 1936 Olympics-Berlin," 175.

48. Sherrill to Marguerite LeHand (Roosevelt's Personal Secretary), undated, President's Secretary's File (PSF) 44, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library. Sherrill opened the letter by saying, "Am off to Nuremberg as Hitler's personal guest to hear (and see!) him address the great Nazi rally there." The Nuremberg rally was held on September 15, 1935. The letter was therefore written before that point in time. Krüger dates the letter to Baillet-Latour, August 30th. The nervous tone of that letter (no resolution of the problem) indicates that the letter to LeHand was written after August 30th. He told Miss LeHand that the Jewish question had been settled.

49. *Ibid.*

50. Sherrill report to LeHand, undated, *ibid.* Sherrill likely mailed this report to Washington as soon as he had it prepared. The lack of Olympic commentary likely means that the issue had not been settled to that point. Therefore, the report likely preceded the undated letter mentioned above. It is significant that Sherrill wanted all of these reports shown to Roosevelt. LeHand was asked to forward the material to the President.

abbreviated form, served to accentuate his power of expression. This report and Sherrill's visit to Nuremberg indicate that he was mesmerized by Hitler's accomplishments and character. In a follow-up letter to LeHand dated September 14th, Sherrill related the fact that his four day visit to Nuremberg had paid witness to further negotiations with von Tschammer und Osten. Authorization had been provided to place a Jewish athlete on the team. Granted, Sherrill was a key figure in securing Mayer's participation, however, it would appear that the move was initiated only so that boycott supporters would be silenced before the 1935 A.A.U. Convention.⁵¹

Consistent with his investigative character, Messersmith obtained information concerning the Sherrill-Hitler conference. In a letter to Chief of Western European Affairs, James Clement Dunn, he observed that Sherrill had addressed the University Club (Paris) with respect to his meeting with Hitler, and asserted that the situation was conducive to complete American participation. Assuming the newspaper report to be factual, Messersmith charged that Sherrill was knowingly presenting a false picture of the German-Jewish situation.⁵²

Messersmith's source of information on the Sherrill investigation was a man named dePauer. Although the Minister considered the free lance writer a "lightweight," a discussion between dePauer and Austrian Legation secretary George Kennan proved enlightening. Apparently, dePauer had recently been in Germany and learned of the 'psychological tactics' used to convince Sherrill of the Germans' honest intentions. As we have already seen, the General thought a great deal of himself and of his role in obtaining German pledges. Undoubtedly, the shrewd Germans recognized Sherrill's egotism and attempted to capitalize on it. Messersmith informed Dunn that the Germans considered Sherrill to be "a man of considerable personal vanity." They decided to impress him by holding the conference with Hitler at Berchtesgaden where an honour guard of S. S. men would receive Sherrill. Sherrill left the building "beaming with satisfaction," and the Germans considered their efforts "a clever bit of hoodwinking."⁵³

Although Messersmith's version of the encounter remains fascinating, a number of inconsistencies must be addressed. In Sherrill's unofficial six page report to Roosevelt's secretary, he noted that the meeting took place in Munich, rather than Berchtesgaden. Sherrill would have little reason to hide the true

51. Sherrill to LeHand, September 14, 1935, *ibid.* Upon his return from Germany, Sherrill stated: "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. As to obstacles placed in the way of Jewish athletes or any others in trying to reach Olympic ability, I would have no more business discussing that in Germany than if the Germans attempted to discuss the Negro situation in the South or the treatment of the Japanese in California." See *New York Times*, October 22, 1935.

52. Messersmith to Dunn, October 17, 1935, *MP*, Document No. 596. Messersmith also informed Dunn of the meeting that he had with Sherrill at Ambassador Morris' home.

53. *Ibid.* The author was continually frustrated during a search for the first name of dePauer. Messersmith remarked that dePauer was connected with *Time*, *Fortune* and *Town and County* magazines, however, missives to the headquarters of these publications failed to uncover dePauer's given name. Curiously, dePauer was mentioned in two letters addressed to Avery Brundage. A June, 1934 letter indicates that dePauer had contacted Brundage in an attempt to befriend the A.O.C. President. DePauer had also offered to talk to Lewald and Diem on behalf of the A.O.C. leadership, and reported to Gustavus Kirby following that discussion. See Kirby to Brundage, June 27, 1934, A.B.C. Box 28. Unfortunately, a second letter also failed to mention dePauer's first name. See Kirby to Brundage, July 8, 1935, A .B.C. Box 29. The author was forced to admit that Messersmith's assertion concerning dePauer's "lightweight" status was an accurate one.

setting of the meeting from the President. Sherrill also noted that only one German soldier met him at the door and made a point of saying that the conference was not marked by any display of German patriotism.⁵⁴ Sherrill was certainly capable of telling different versions of one event to two different people, however, it seems unlikely that Sherrill would neglect to mention any production staged in his honour. On the contrary, he likely would have made great mention of such a welcome.

Regardless of the accuracy of Messersmith's information, the Minister was extremely distressed and agitated by Sherrill's approval of German preparations. The dishonesty of Theodor Lewald was unnerving, but he acknowledged that Lewald was subject to deportation to a concentration camp if he did not cooperate with the German authorities. Messersmith felt that Lewald's trickery was:

bad enough, but what to my mind is worse is that General Sherrill could not have been ignorant of the circumstances and was quite willing to accept this white-washing of the situation through his eagerness that we participate. What General Sherrill is interested in is to maintain his important position on the Olympic Committee, and that position would lose a good deal of importance if our participation was small.⁵⁵

Although Messersmith declined to criticize Sherrill in 1934, his patience had run out in the wake of Sherrill's investigative effort. He directed a number of letters to the State Department that stressed the fact.

Above all, Messersmith felt helpless. He apparently received only one reply to his extensive Olympic correspondence, and that letter stated that the State Department was in no position to become involved.⁵⁶ The lack of response from Cordell Hull likely prompted his expanded search for a sympathetic ear. During 1934-1935, he addressed Olympic updates to Chief of Western European Affairs Jay Pierrepont Moffat, his successor James Clement Dunn, and Undersecretary of State William Phillips, as well as Hull. However, not one provided Messersmith with the desired answers. As Messersmith sadly confided to Dunn, "the full Olympic story is a sorry one. I sometimes wish that I did not know as much about it as I do, for it makes me rather sad and I have had to lose confidence in a good many friends."⁵⁷ However, the major targets of his wrath remained Avery Brundage and Charles Sherrill.

Sherrill repeatedly tried to tell the American public or anybody who would listen to him that his actions were not motivated by feelings of anti-Semitism. On the contrary, he maintained that he was pro-Jewish. Apparently, a number of people representing various Chambers of Commerce and trade journals in

54. Sherrill report to LeHand, undated, PSF 44, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.

55. Messersmith to Dunn, October 17, 1935, *MP*, Document No. 596. The following quote of participation advocate Gustavus Kirby lends credence to Messersmith's assertion concerning Sherrill's motivation. Kirby noted Sherrill's tendency to place his personal interests to the forefront when he informed Brundage that, "General Sherrill is not being held in high account by Baillet-Latour or his conferees on the I.O.C. who claim, and properly so, that all he thinks and cares about is Charlie Sherrill and the honors and decorations which he can receive." See Kirby to Brundage, July 8, 1935, *A.B.C.*, Box 29.

56. Dunn to Messersmith, November 20, 1935, *MP*, Document No. 616.

57. Messersmith to Dunn, December 4, 1935, *MP*, Document No. 624.

America attempted to convince Sherrill that he would be an ideal Republican Vice-Presidential candidate.⁵⁸ The rationale behind this view revolved around their interpretation of Sherrill's Olympic actions. These individuals felt that a ticket including Sherrill would receive the majority of the anti-Semite vote because Sherrill had dueled with a number of prominent Jews over the issue of participation. Sherrill denied that he would consider opposing Roosevelt, As if letting Jews in his home cleared Sherrill of anti-Semitic allegations, he somewhat pathetically noted that these people "did not seem to realize that I have all along been pro-Jewish, as evidenced by Henry Morgenthau Senior and Arthur Sulzberger coming to my house (one hour and two hours, respectively)." ⁵⁹ However, Sherrill wanted no one, including the President, to think that he did not consider himself suited for the position. As an afterthought Sherrill reasoned that "besides it looks as if Borah, the pro-Soviet, would head the Republican ticket, and I am anti-Communist and anti-Soviet."⁶⁰

In light of the evidence, an evaluation of the actions of Sherrill and Messersmith becomes necessary. These men were on opposite sides of the issue, but they approached the Olympic question with equal vigour. Sherrill maintained that he supported the Jewish people and that his beliefs were pro-Jewish. The I.O.C. member may have honestly felt that this was the case, however, an obviously more accurate description of his involvement would be pro-Olympic. He displayed early concern for the plight of the German-Jewish athletes and was instrumental in obtaining conciliatory German pledges. However, his seemingly obvious disregard for the honouring of those pledges place his actions in question. He had an opportunity to let the members of the A.O.C. determine participation on the basis of accurate information but repeatedly provided Committee meetings with reassuring, and misleading, messages.

In 1933, Sherrill voiced a belief that the German-Jewish athletic controversy was not an internal German matter. However, in the heat of the 1935 debate, Sherrill hid behind the I.O.C. cloak, and claimed that German team selection was the concern of the German Olympic Committee alone. Sherrill knew of the discrimination, but intentionally withheld that information from those who were entrusted with the decision of American participation. The lack of regard for this duty represented the negligence that disappointed Messersmith. He also became extremely involved in the issue, although his opinions did not directly bear on the situation. The frustration because of the cover-up action by the A.O.C. leadership was repeatedly mentioned in his correspondence. He encouraged Hull and the State Department to see that the A.O.C. membership received accurate information. Gaining no satisfaction from Hull, he broadened the scope of his reports to others within the Department in search of affirmative action.

58. Charles Sherrill to Franklin D. Roosevelt, November 19, 1935, PPF 2541, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.

59. Ibid. Although apologetic to Roosevelt in personal communication, Sherrill still felt that one of the stumbling blocks to ensuring American participation was the 'disproportionate' number of Jews in Roosevelt's cabinet. See *New York Times*. October 24, 1935.

60. *ibid.*

The obvious question remains, why were Messersmith's warnings not heeded by the State Department and Roosevelt himself? A respected foreign service representative, Messersmith prepared detailed reports which addressed the issues of discrimination, deliberate disregard of pledges, the psychological importance of the games to Hitler and the Nazis, as well as Austria's involvement in the Olympic controversy.⁶¹ Roosevelt was urged as early as December 1933 by a senior Jewish advisor, Judge Samuel Rosenman, to avoid involvement in the Olympic question. Rosenman did not disclose the basis for his opinion.⁶² The lack of action by the State Department and the Executive Branch of government paralleled American foreign policy in regard to the Jewish crisis. In respect to the Jewish problem, Roosevelt and the State Department avoided intervention. The President had informed William Dodd at the time of his appointment to the Ambassadorial post that the American government could only involve itself in situations involving American citizens in Germany who suffered from discrimination or maltreatment.⁶³ A December 12, 1935 letter from Cordell Hull to Senator Augustine Lonergan (Connecticut) summarizes the stand of the Roosevelt administration pertaining to American participation. Lonergan had asked Hull for his position and guidance on participation as one of his constituents had approached him in search of boycott support.⁶⁴ Hull coolly responded:

The question of participation, of course, does not fall within the competence of any agency of this government but it is a matter exclusively for determination by the private organizations directly concerned. I am sure you will realize therefore that it would not be appropriate for me to make a statement which might be construed as in any way interfering with the freedom of decision of these organizations.⁶⁵

Messersmith's persistence deserves admiration. Although continually frustrated by a lack of response on the issue from Washington, his reports became even more numerous. The fact that he maintained intimate contact with the situation following his transfer to Vienna indicates that he truly felt that participation had serious ramifications. Whereas Messersmith's counsel and

61. See for instance, Messersmith to Phillips, August 27, 1935, *MP*, Document No. 558. In the late summer of 1935, Austria's Vice-Chancellor Prince Starhemberg banned Austrian athletes from all athletic competitions in Germany. The German newspaper, *Völkischer Beobachter*, had launched a series of attacks against the Austrian government's leadership, and Starhemberg took this action as a form of protest. The Germans quickly halted publication of such material for fear of an Austrian boycott of the games. The Germans eventually convinced the Austrians to rescind the ban.

62. Judge Samuel Rosenman to Franklin D. Roosevelt, December 22, 1933, OF 757, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library. It is apparent that a number of Jewish leaders feared an intensification of the anti-Semitism prevalent in American society during the 1930s. The fear was based on the assumption that an American withdrawal would be viewed by many Americans as a Jewish-inspired action. See for instance, the comments of New York Rabbi Abraham L. Feinberg. Feinberg agreed that an American boycott would represent a "body blow to Nazism," but at the same time the attention that Jews had given to the issue during the 1933-1935 period disturbed him. Feinberg maintained that "we Jews have been spending more time and energy on the Olympics than they deserve our prestige is involved to such an extent that we are bound to suffer." *New York Times*, October 30, 1935.

63. Ambassador *Dodd's Diary 1933-1938*, 5.

64. Senator Lonergan to Hull, December 9, 1935, 862.4063 Olympic Games/59, Diplomatic Branch, National Archives.

65. Hull to Lonergan, December 12, 1935. 862.4063 Olympic Games/59, Diplomatic Branch, National Archives.

foresight deserve respect, the actions of Charles Sherrill cannot be placed in such favourable light. His position on the I.O.C. was a critical post in terms of the effect that it would have on the outcome of the debate. He allowed himself to become compromised for the sake of American participation. Hart-Davis has raised the question whether a boycott would have altered Hitler's military plans as the successful staging of the games provided Hitler with an abundance of favourable propaganda.⁶⁶ A boycott would have had little impact on Hitler's future aggression, but the fact remains that Sherrill was not truthful with the voting members of the American Olympic establishment. Avery Brundage has been subject to much criticism in this regard, but it would appear that Charles Sherrill's actions indicate further indiscretion on the part of a number of the leaders of the American Olympic movement.

In America, proponents of the view that the Olympic movement must separate itself from political ideology narrowly triumphed over those who objected to Nazi Germany's politicization and exploitation of the games. At a deeper level, the debate centered around the most effective means of furthering the rights of Jews in pre-World War II Germany. Those who sided with Messersmith believed that firm action would show the Nazis the extent of American outrage at the treatment accorded German-Jews by their government. These individuals believed that the U.S. should not involve itself in an Olympic festival which would serve as a form of glorification of National Socialist Germany. Americans who favoured participation approached the situation in a different manner. At best, the celebration of Olympism in Germany would show Hitler and the Nazis the power of the Olympic ideals of brotherhood, equality and peace. At the very least, American participation would prevent further discriminatory measures against a German-Jewish populace which would have been held responsible for any disruption of Germany's plans. An analysis of the respective approaches adopted by Messersmith and Sherrill not only encapsulates the beliefs of many Americans who took opposite stands, but a study of the interaction of these two individuals on the issue also reveals the intensity and determination with which the battle for American participation was waged. Over fifty years later, the debate continues concerning the ability of the Olympic movement to transcend political issues such as the racial policies of Nazi Germany encountered prior to the 1936 Olympic Games.

66. Hart-Davis, *Hitler's Games*, 228-229