

## Tekst 5

Mike Marqusee on the hurdles faced by Louis and Owens

# The great race

In Black and White: The Untold Story of Joe Louis and Jesse Owens by Donald McRae

1 In 1936, under the irritated gaze of Hitler and the Nazi high command, the sprinter and long jumper Jesse Owens won four gold medals at the Berlin Olympics. Two years later, at Yankee stadium in New York, the heavyweight boxer Joe Louis demolished the powerful German champion, Max Schmeling, in a single tumultuous round.

2 Both were stunning performances, displays of competitive prowess that would delight any sports fan anywhere. But they were much more than that. In the context of the rise of European fascism and America's own long-entrenched colour-coded caste system, the achievements of these African-Americans were seen as very significant. In the controlled environment of the sporting arena, their successes offered a laboratory-like refutation of theories of white supremacy. They were hailed at the time not only as victories over fascism and racism, but also as vindications of a despised race and of America itself.

3 Louis and Owens were the sons of sharecroppers and the grandsons of slaves. Born in rural Alabama, they both left the deep south at an early age when their families joined the great migration to the cities of the north (Owens to Cleveland and Louis to Detroit). There, they found outlets for their extraordinary talents – but only at a price.

4 In an America rigidly divided by colour, black champions like Owens and Louis served multiple and often painfully contradictory purposes. Their victories challenged racist assumptions about black inferiority – a challenge more important in the end for blacks than for whites, who quickly found ways to assimilate black excellence in sport within a racist world view. Their successes were also claimed as proof that blacks could make it in a white-dominated world, that the US was a land of unfettered opportunity – a message reassuring for the prosperous whites but double-edged for the disadvantaged black population.

5 Both Louis and Owens took great care to avoid giving offence to white people, while at the same time struggling to maintain their dignity and autonomy as black males. They

used every opportunity to reinforce their credentials as American patriots. As a result, both were routinely praised as credits to their race. And both were abysmally ill-rewarded for their service.

6 Within a fortnight of winning his fourth gold medal at Berlin, Owens was expelled from the track for life by the US athletics authorities. His crime was refusing to complete a tour of pointless exhibition races, a tour arranged without his permission and from which he was to derive zero financial benefit. Louis spent a number of his prime championship years in the army, boxing exhibition matches for which all proceeds were donated to soldiers' and sailors' relief funds. But after he retired, the government hounded him relentlessly for back taxes.

7 At times, both Owens and Louis had to descend to vaudeville to survive – Owens running races against horses, Louis hamming it up as a professional wrestler. No wonder, looking back at their careers, a later and more militant generation of African-Americans scoffed at their futile attempts to placate the white man. Joe and Jesse did everything that was asked of them, and more, and they still ended up short-changed and demeaned.



Victorious... Jesse Owens with the gold medal for long jump, flanked by Naoto Tajima of Japan and Germany's Lutz Long, at the Berlin Olympics, 1936

8 But three decades on, it is possible to see Louis and Owens for what they were – supreme sporting geniuses who were asked to

assume impossible social burdens. Donald McRae's account of their intertwined destinies presents a fair picture of two complex (and very different) individuals who sought to master their fates in a world that simply would not permit them that freedom. His book is clearly a labour of love. The volume and detail of research is impressive – and he makes particularly strong use of a thorough reading of the African-American press of the day.

- 9 However, McRae is led by his understandable admiration for Louis and Owens to overestimate their impact as catalysts for social change. (He exaggerates Louis's interventions against discrimination

in the military.) More worryingly, he switches without warning from carefully documented history to novel-like speculation, supplying detailed dialogue for scenes at which no living person was present, and assigning private thoughts and feelings to his protagonists in specific times and places for which there can be no sources. The reader begins to wonder what is established fact, what is hearsay and what is simply invented. It's a pity. The practice undermines a book noteworthy both for its compassion and for its vivid recreations of some of the most dramatic sporting encounters of modern times.

*The Guardian*

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- 3p 9  Geef voor elk van de onderstaande stellingen aan of deze wel of niet in overeenstemming is met de alinea's 1 en 2 van de tekst.

Louis' and Owens' sporting achievements

1 established the United States as the leading sports nation in the world.

2 greatly improved the circumstances of black Americans.

3 had a great impact on social and political views of the day.

4 were the first to be turned into media events.

5 were belittled by America's white population.

6 were seen as evidence disproving racist ideas.

Noteer het nummer van elke stelling, gevolgd door "wel" of "niet".

- 1p 10 ■ Which of the following characterises paragraph 3?

- A It explains that Louis' and Owens' successes were primarily a matter of good luck.
- B It shows how Louis and Owens grasped every opportunity to improve their lot.
- C It sketches Louis' and Owens' life stories against the background of black social history.

- 1p 11 ■ How did white racists react to Louis' and Owens' victories according to paragraph 4?

- A They acknowledged that they had to give up their ideas about white superiority.
- B They ignored black sporting achievements and stuck to their ideas of white superiority.
- C They incorporated black sporting achievement into their reasoning about white superiority.

- 1p 12 ■ Why was the "message" (end paragraph 4) double-edged for America's black population? Because it implied that

- A black sportsmen who were not so successful could easily be dismissed as second-rate.
- B blacks would have to compete with whites outside the sporting arena as well.
- C the black population had only itself to blame for its lack of achievement.

- 1p 13 ■ Which of the following can be concluded about Louis and Owens from paragraph 5?

- A They failed to grasp the chance to cash in on their popularity.
- B They had to strike a careful balance between acting as stars and remaining ordinary.
- C They just pretended to love their country in order to remain in the sporting arena.
- D They tried hard not to alienate the radical elements among the American black population.
- E They were well aware of what American society expected of them.

# Eindexamen Engels vwo 2006-I

- 1p **14** ■ How does paragraph 6 connect to paragraph 5?
- A As a conclusion from what is stated in the last sentence of paragraph 5.
  - B As a counter-argument to what is stated in the last sentence of paragraph 5.
  - C As an illustration of what is stated in the last sentence of paragraph 5.
  - D As an ironic comment on what is stated in the last sentence of paragraph 5.
- 1p **15** □ Welk verwijt kregen Louis en Owens achteraf, volgens alinea 7?
- 1p **16** ■ Which of the following points does Mike Marqusee put forward in praise of McRae's book (paragraph 8)?
- A It defends Louis and Owens against accusations of letting down their own people.
  - B It displays the author's expert knowledge in its description of the great sporting events.
  - C It does justice to Louis and Owens by putting their behaviour in a historical perspective.
  - D It reveals the close personal relationship between two sportsmen who were very unlike.
- 1p **17** ■ Which of the following are the points of criticism that Mike Marqusee puts forward in paragraph 9?
- 1 McRae blurs the line between fact and fiction.
  - 2 McRae makes too much of Louis' and Owens' influence outside the sporting world.
  - 3 McRae ignores Louis' and Owens' shortcomings.
  - 4 McRae's elaborate accounts of sporting events take up too much space in the book.
- A 1 and 2
  - B 2 and 3
  - C 1 and 3
  - D 3 and 4
  - E 1, 3 and 4
  - F 1, 2, 3 and 4