



4-1-1982

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Recommended Citation

Marvin, C. (1982). Avery Brundage and American Participation in the 1936 Olympic Games. *Journal of American Studies*, 16 (1), 81-106. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S002187580000949X>

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Abstract

Avery Brundage liked to say that revolutionaries were not bred on the playing field. That theme neatly expressed Brundage's distrust of any challenge to the established political and social order he cherished and garnished his speeches to countless audiences during the forty years in which he was the single most powerful figure in both the American and international Olympic movements, first as president of the American Olympic Committee (1929-53), and then as president of the International Olympic Committee (1952-72). Although the Iron Chancellor of amateur sport regarded himself as the last true defender of the strict separation of sport and politics, he also frequently insisted that more than the future of amateur sport was at stake in shielding sport from political manipulation. Upon sport for sport's sake depended the healthy psychological valuation of individual effort and excellence that was at the very heart of a democratic way of life. Moreover, fit bodies and competitive spirits were in Brundage's view essential for the continued success of American capitalism at home and abroad. Though he never acknowledged the political coloring of his vision of the Olympics, he regarded them as a kind of international mission for spreading democratic values in the continuing ideological battle between Communism and the American way of life.

Disciplines

International and Intercultural Communication

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CAROLYN MARVIN

Avery Brundage liked to say that revolutionaries were not bred on the playing field. That theme neatly expressed Brundage's distrust of any challenge to the established political and social order he cherished and garnished his speeches to countless audiences during the forty years in which he was the single most powerful figure in both the American and international Olympic movements, first as president of the American Olympic Committee (1929-53), and then as president of the International Olympic Committee (1952-72). Although the Iron Chancellor of amateur sport regarded himself as the last true defender of the strict separation of sport and politics, he also frequently insisted that more than the future of amateur sport was at stake in shielding sport from political manipulation. Upon sport for sport's sake depended the healthy psychological valuation of individual effort and excellence that was at the very heart of a democratic way of life. Moreover, fit bodies and competitive spirits were in Brundage's view essential for the continued success of American capitalism at home and abroad. Though he never acknowledged the political coloring of his vision of the Olympics, he regarded them as a kind of international mission for spreading democratic values in the continuing ideological battle between Communism and the American way of life.

Because it dramatizes victory, defeat, struggle against nature and other competitors, sport is a potent symbol constantly under pressure to lend its emotional power to other causes. The Olympic Games have been coveted as a political symbol throughout the modern period, partly because their official

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Amer. Stud. 16, 1, 81-106 Printed in Great Britain
0021-8758/82/BAAS-1005 \$01.50 © 1982 Cambridge University Press

tradition of political neutrality nourishes the very temptation to capture them. The revival of the modern Olympics was rooted in its founder Baron de Coubertin's political apprehension of gathering Prussian militarism, his hope of offering French youth incentives to pursue soldierly physical fitness and his intention to provide the nations of the world with a peaceful channel for releasing aggression. The first interruption of the modern Games occurred as opening hostilities in World War I cancelled the Berlin Games scheduled for 1916. And between 1933 and 1936, the 1936 Berlin Games became the prize in a tug of war for control between the German National Socialist regime, the International Olympic Committee, and anti-Nazi supporters of an Olympic boycott.

The deciding factor in that struggle was the American debate over whether to withhold a U.S. Olympic team from Berlin as a protest against the mistreatment of Jews at the hands of the Nazis. In spite of considerable organized public opinion in support of a boycott, the views of the American Olympic Committee, the most powerful defender of Olympic business as usual, prevailed. With American participation settled, no other country felt disposed to offer any further challenge. The Berlin Olympics went forward as scheduled.

Aspects of the German side of the Olympic boycott controversy have been discussed elsewhere.¹ This essay will examine how, as the American Olympic Committee President, Brundage interpreted both the unfolding boycott controversy and events in Europe in order to justify his own position in favor of participation and to call into question that of his opponents. As the chief strategist for American participation he did not observe the standard of strict separation between sport and politics upon which he was so vocal publicly. He argued from a partisan perspective on behalf of a political goal which, as he confided to his friends, was to advance democracy in the shape of a strong, successful Berlin Olympics against both Communism and

¹ See Hajo Bernett, *Untersuchungen zur Zeitgeschichte des Sports* (Schorndorf: Hoffman, 1974), Carl Diem, *Ein Leben für den Sport* (Dusseldorf: Henn, 1974), Arnd Krüger, *Die Olympischen Spiele 1936 und die Weltmeinung* (Frankfurt: Bartels & Wernitz, 1972) and *Theodor Lewald* (Frankfurt: Bartels & Wernitz, 1975), and Dietrich Steinhöfer's *Hans von Tschammer und Osten* (Dusseldorf: Henn, 1974). For American perspectives, see Richard D. Mandell, *The Nazi Olympics* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), Moshe Gottlieb, "The American Controversy Over the Olympic Games," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 61 (March 1972), pp. 181-213; Stanley B. Frank, *The Jew in Sports* (New York: Miles Publishing Co., 1936), pp. 11-15, and Arthur D. Morse, *While Six Million Died* (New York: Random House, 1967). This paper is based on the Avery Brundage Collection, hereafter designated ABC, at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

the misguided politics of Eastern liberals in league with Jewish interest groups.

I

The decade of the thirties seemed to Brundage wholly out of step with his conservative midwestern temper. The intractability of Depression poverty and the scope of the federal response to it violated every laissez-faire notion he held dear. The compassion of the welfare state seemed to him a mortal challenge to the American tradition of equality of rights and opportunity. He believed the country – indeed the world – should look to pure sport, where self-discipline and hard work rewarded the natural aristocracy of ability, to find principles for the proper conduct of life. “Where amateur sport with its high ideals flourishes, there civilization advances,” was a characteristic Brundage sentiment.² His enthusiasm for a laissez-faire meritocracy was empirically justified by his own life. From humble beginnings he had become an Olympic decathlon champion and a self-made millionaire. And though he was vigilantly attentive to the dangers of mixing politics and sport, Brundage perceived a natural and benign affinity between industry and sport. The business of both was to achieve new triumphs through vigorous competition according to the rules of fair play that rewarded the most enterprising and dedicated.³ The ideological component of this view escaped him utterly.

The Games of the Eleventh Olympiad had been awarded to Germany before Hitler came to power. In Brundage’s view National Socialism was wholly separate from Olympic concerns, since the Games belonged to the IOC and not to any host country. Beneath the officially neutral facade which Brundage shared with the IOC, however, lay his feeling that America should applaud the New Germany for halting Communist gains in Western Europe, and a subterranean anti-Semitism which discovered Jewish interests in league with both a misguided liberal establishment and a sinister and deadly Communist conspiracy to undermine traditional American values.

Two groups of challengers, legalists and moralists, called into question Olympic policy towards Germany between Hitler’s rise to power in 1933 and the opening of the Summer Games in Berlin in August 1936. The

² “Remarks of Welcome by Avery Brundage in Behalf of AAU to British Empire Track Team Upon Arrival in Chicago 1930,” ABC. See also “Oak Park” speech notes, 20 Oct. 1938, ABC.

³ See “Athletics and Industry,” address to the Chicago Chamber of Commerce, 10 June 1931, *passim.*, ABC.

legalists disputed the assurances of the International Olympic Committee that Germany had observed Olympic protocol which forbade religious or racial discrimination against Olympic athletes. The moralists were firmly opposed to further legitimizing the Nazi regime among the family of nations by awarding it the world's most prestigious festival of sportsmanship. Brundage believed that the charges of the legalists were false, and he refused to debate the moralists at all. The sensitive issue of sport in the service of German political ambition had already surfaced in debate over the re-certification of Germany for membership in the Olympic community after World War I. Sent in 1930 to observe the army-less Germans hard at work building mass sport facilities, American Olympic Committee treasurer Gustavus T. Kirby, one of Brundage's stoutest supporters for most of the boycott controversy, had countered comments about military overtones in the German effort with the argument:

that the German psychology is not that of deception, that the World War was not only in their hearts but on their lips before it was precipitated, and that if the rest of the world were blind it was certainly not because Germany had not for years been openly boasting of "der Tag," and that therefore if the present activity were being directed toward a war-like end we would certainly hear of it and know of it.⁴

Public unease in the United States about the Games of the Eleventh Olympiad was at first a reaction to German ambivalence. In quick succession, the Nazis claimed not to want the Games, called for the ouster of Dr. Theodor Lewald, the distinguished part-Jewish president of the German Olympic Organizing Committee, and barred Jewish athletes from sport clubs, training facilities and competition. Critics now had a focus for the steady stream of press accounts of indignities and abuses heaped on Jewish citizens by the Nazi regime.

Telegrams, phone calls and letters demanding an official American reaction besieged Brundage as the president of the AOC, and he released a statement giving his "personal but unofficial opinion" that the IOC would not permit the Games to be held wherever there might be "interference with the fundamental Olympic theory of equality of all races."⁵ To Brundage's irritation, this was reported as an official challenge to German Olympic Committee policy. He had meant only to reassure the American public upon whose good will Olympic activities depended, he explained in a letter to the nervous Dr. Lewald, facing problems of his own and fearing the defection of the large and prestigious American team.⁶ Since no one really knew

⁴ Gustavus T. Kirby to Howard S. Braucher, 9 June 1930, ABC.

⁵ Avery Brundage to J. A. Miller, 15 Apr. 1933, ABC.

⁶ Brundage to Dr. Theodor Lewald, 18 May 1933, ABC.

whether the Germans intended to exclude their own Jewish athletes from the Games, Brundage wrote AOC secretary Frederick W. Rubien, a week after his public statement, that he did not believe specific protests were in order.⁷ This was the sporting response: to submit the controversy to the rule of law and to give the other side the benefit of the doubt. It also was a sophisticated first line of defense. Brundage would not press the Germans because he did not know the facts. Later, convinced he did know the facts, he would not concede the same achievement to his detractors, most of whom, he once remarked to Gus Kirby had “never been any closer to Germany than New York City.”⁸

During 1933 and 1934 the International Olympic Committee maneuvered to extract formal pledges from the reluctant Germans to observe Olympic protocol. “I am not personally fond of jews and of the jewish influence,” IOC president Comte Henri de Baillet-Latour wrote Brundage, “but I will not have them molested in no way [sic] whatsoever.”⁹ Finding himself caught between what he considered to be the overzealousness of the new German regime on the one hand, and the overzealousness of the Jews on the other, he added, “I know that they [the Jews] shout before there is reason to do so.” At the IOC annual convention in Vienna in June 1933, Baillet-Latour used the American Olympic boycott threat, fanned into existence by public opinion, as leverage against the German delegates, who went scurrying back and forth to the telephone for new orders from Berlin.¹⁰

From the side Baillet-Latour also countenanced a resolution written by Gus Kirby and passed in November, 1933, by the American Athletic Union (AAU), the largest sports governing body in the country, urging the American Olympic Association not to certify American athletes for Olympic competition until the German government had fulfilled its June pledges for the recruitment and training of Jewish athletes.¹¹

Although Brundage had acknowledged late in 1933 that every news dispatch from Germany “seemed to indicate that the Hitlerites did not intend to live up to the pledges given to the IOC at Vienna,”¹² he privately

⁷ Brundage to Frederick W. Rubien, 21 Apr. 1933, ABC.

⁸ Brundage to Kirby, 27 Sept. 1935, ABC.

⁹ Monsieur le Comte de Henri Baillet-Latour to Brundage, 3 Nov. 1933, ABC.

¹⁰ See General Charles H. Sherrill to Rubien, 11 June 1933, ABC.

¹¹ What Baillet-Latour specifically advocated in a letter to Brundage, 3 Nov. 1933, ABC, was a resolution from the American AAU addressed to the German Amateur Athletic Union specifying German fulfillment of its IOC pledges as a condition of AOC acceptance of the invitation to the 1936 Games. He also suggested that the AOC formally request a report on the German situation from the three American delegates to the IOC as a prerequisite to action on the Olympic invitation.

¹² Brundage to Baillet-Latour, 28 Dec. 1935, ABC.

opposed the Kirby resolution. He feared its effect on the carefully structured peace he had brought to warring factions of the AAU during his presidency of that body, and he particularly feared an uncontrolled AAU, which he believed had had too much influence on AOC policy in the past.¹³ Even though the Kirby resolution was intended to deflect more inflammatory proposals, Brundage and Rubien groused privately about it to one another and complained to Kirby. They insisted that a resolution would embarrass the already beleaguered German Olympic leaders; that there was no hurry to force the issue since there were likely to be many changes in Germany before the Games; that there was the matter of American hypocrisy in respect of her own "color line" in the South.¹⁴ Brundage also had concluded that the Jews were over-reacting. Writing to Baillet-Latour, who agreed with him on this point, he referred obliquely to that assessment and conceded that the resolution had after all had a useful effect:

so far as the general situation is concerned, my views concur with yours, but nevertheless no one should be allowed to repudiate definite promises, and I think a sharp warning notice was in order.¹⁵

From the beginning the president of the AOC and the president of the IOC saw eye to eye on the boycott controversy. Brundage had learned in 1933 that he was in line for election to the IOC. Membership in that organization represented the summit of his aspirations, and the importance of Baillet-Latour's unqualified approval undoubtedly sharpened his desire to deliver an American team triumphantly to Berlin.¹⁶

In May 1934, after a *pro forma* review, the IOC declared itself satisfied that the Germans had kept their promises. IOC assurances of German good faith could not stem a gradually organizing American opposition to Olympic participation, an opposition convinced by Baillet-Latour's own tactics of the previous summer that a boycott was both a useful weapon to keep the Germans in line and a moral alternative. Faced with continuing challenges, and at Gus Kirby's suggestion, the AOC delegated its president to inspect the German situation in person, and to accept or reject the Olympic invitation on the spot.¹⁷

¹³ Brundage to Marvin F. Plake, 15 Oct. 1937, ABC.

¹⁴ Rubien to Brundage, 28 Oct. 1933, ABC; Brundage to Kirby, 5 Nov. 1933, ABC.

¹⁵ Brundage to Baillet-Latour, 28 Dec. 1933, ABC.

¹⁶ Correspondence concerning Brundage's candidacy for the IOC includes Kirby to Brundage, 8 July 1935, ABC; Brundage to Kirby, 15 July 1935, ABC; Kirby to Brundage, 26 June 1936, ABC.

¹⁷ Baillet-Latour to Brundage, telegram, 26 May 1934, ABC; Kirby to Brundage, 23 Apr. 1934, ABC; *Olympic News*, Aug. 1934, p. 27, ABC.

Brundage saw this assignment as a tactical procedure. In a letter to Kirby he observed that no one could fully survey the German situation on a brief visit, and that as a matter of expedience he was content to accept the judgment of the IOC.¹⁸ In a statement published on the eve of his departure to Europe, he exhorted American youth to prepare for the coming Games and left little doubt that he expected to find the German house of sport in order. But shrewdly he left the final decision on the German invitation to the full AOC Executive Committee, which met on 26 September, the day after his return, for a two-hour report of his observations and discussions with Reich and GOC officials and spokesmen for Jewish sports organizations. The choice Brundage presented to the AOC was between taking a stand on German policies within the narrow circumference of sport, or taking a stand on German policies in general. The committee voted unanimously to confine its deliberations to German sport policies and to accept the German Olympic invitation.¹⁹

With this decision Brundage was girded for battle with a ringing public argument in favor of participation and a defensible account of his own actions and those of the other sport authorities involved. The heart of his public argument was that the business of the Olympic Games was not to engage in political arguments, but to rise above them. The IOC had prevented the Germans from using the Olympics to serve their political purposes; it had a binding obligation to rescue them from Hitler's political enemies as well. But a corollary to this equitable defense of nonpartisanship was calculatedly political: since the sole concessions wrested from Hitler by the world at large had been the non-discrimination guarantees secured by Olympic authorities, the Olympic Games might well be an "entering wedge" against Hitler's anti-Semitic policies.²⁰

II

The defensible history of the handling of what Brundage's files labeled the "Berlin Problem" was that the IOC and the various national Olympic committees had exercised their legitimate authority at appropriate times. Having thus played by the rules, they could not allow spoilers to challenge

¹⁸ Brundage to Kirby, 3 Mar. 1932, ABC.

¹⁹ Brundage, "For Honor of Country and Glory of Sport," *Olympic News Magazine*, Aug. 1934, pp. 3-11, ABC; "Brundage's Approval of Berlin's Conduct Forecasts U.S. Acceptance of Olympic Bid," *New York Times*, 11 Aug. 1934; Brundage to Harold M. Abrahams, 13 Oct. 1934, ABC.

²⁰ Brundage to Charles Ornstein, 8 Oct. 1934, ABC.

the final score. Decisions at each level were justified by their obedience to the authority of the next higher level. Pressed, for example, by wavering AOC members, Brundage's colleagues invoked the rightful authority of the AOC president himself. Charlie Ornstein, one of the handful of boycott advocates within the AOC, received the following prod from Gus Kirby a few months after Brundage's inspection trip to Germany:

I cannot help but continue to have faith and confidence in the honesty, the judgement and the powers of observation and deduction therefrom of the President of the American Olympic Committee, to whom we gave power to act for us and who still believes that there is no reason at all why we should not continue in our attitude of willingness and desire to compete and in the belief that conditions have not changed at all or materially from the time of his visit.²¹

Brundage in his turn argued that the United States had no grounds for withdrawing from the Olympics if the Germans were behaving legally, and that authority for the final determination of that fact lay with the IOC.²²

Evolving along with the legalistic arguments of public debate was a more subterranean anti-Semitic construction of reality directed at special audiences of allies and opponents. Some Olympic officials said to one another and to selected audiences that the Jews were complaining too much. Writing Brundage to report that the British would likely accept the Olympic invitation in light of the AOC president's visit to Germany, Evan Hunter, secretary of the British Olympic Association, confided, "My own view is that we are pandering too much to the Jews!"²³

The Jews were complaining too much, first, according to a peculiarly circular IOC standard of evidence as to whether their complaints had substance, and second, because they were like that. Brundage regularly observed in his correspondence with other sport officials that "the Jews have been clever enough to realize the publicity value of sport."²⁴ He was informed by J. Sigfrid Edstrom, president of the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF), that "the main reason of the Arian movement in Germany" was that "the Jews have taken a too prominent position in certain branches of life and have – as the Jews very often do when they get in the majority – misused their positions."²⁵ Also freely circulated in IOC correspondence was the conviction that Jewish suspicions were groundless

²¹ Kirby to Ornstein, 21 Jan. 1935, ABC; also Joseph E. Raycroft to Brundage, 7 Oct. 1935, ABC.

²² Brundage to Kirby, 3 Mar. 1934, ABC; Brundage to Kirby, 27 Sept. 1935, ABC.

²³ Evan Hunter to Brundage, 23 Nov. 1934, ABC.

²⁴ Brundage to J. Sigfrid Edstrom, 29 Aug. 1935, ABC; also Brundage to John C. Grover, 10 June 1935, ABC.

²⁵ Edstrom to Brundage, 12 Sept. 1935, ABC.

since one of the IOC's German delegates, Karl Ritter von Halt, a man held in high personal regard by Brundage and many others, had given his "word of honour" that Jewish athletes were being equitably treated.²⁶

Brundage's clinching argument in this series of propositions was that Jews had never been a significant proportion of any German Olympic team; the claim, therefore, that low Jewish representation resulted from Nazi intimidation was either ignorance or manipulation of the facts for Jewish self-aggrandizement. "The Germans report that there have been only twelve Jews on all of their previous teams," Brundage explained to one inquirer.²⁷ To Charlie Ornstein he wrote:

I happened to see the original letters from the Deutsche Sportbehörde für Leichtathletik to the German Maccabi and Jewish Front Soldier organizations asking for nominations for the German Olympic Track and Field team. I also saw the reply from these Jewish organizations giving a list of the performances of the best athletes. The man who showed it to me was somewhat embarrassed because there was hardly a man listed whose performances were of Olympic caliber. Nevertheless, a number of them were selected for special training.²⁸

Such evidence was easily manipulated. High-jumper Gretel Bergman, now Margaret Lambert, has recently described leaving Germany in 1933, because of her Jewish ancestry, to pursue an athletic career in Britain.²⁹ Under threat of reprisal against her family and other Jews, she was ordered back to Germany to try out for the Olympic team. At special trials held five weeks before the opening of the Summer Games, she achieved a performance that equaled the German women's high-jump record and would have placed her in the finals that summer. Once the American Olympic team had sailed for Germany, however, she received a letter from the German sport authorities to the effect that her performance was not good enough.

Not only did Jews exalt their own political interests above the independence of amateur sport; not only did they fail to appreciate the contribution of the Olympic movement to whatever restraint Hitler had exercised; but also, Brundage argued with increasing irritation, Jewish protest would be counter-productive in the long run. An Olympic boycott on account of the Jews would excite dangerous, possibly uncontrollable anti-Semitic sympathies in America. Moreover, Brundage claimed, "intelligent and conservative" (which also implied wealthy and prominent) Jews agreed with him. "The

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Brundage to Mrs. B. C. Farver, 3 Jan. 1936, ABC.

²⁸ Brundage to Ornstein, 26 Jan. 1935, ABC; see also Kirby to Ornstein, 21 Jan. 1935, ABC, and Kirby to Samuel Untermyer, 8 July 1935, ABC.

²⁹ Margaret Lambert, "A Jewish Athlete and the Nazi Olympics of '36," *New York Times*, 3 Feb. 1980.

sober, conservative Jews in this country are very seriously concerned over present developments, and they have warrant to be," he wrote Kirby late in 1935:

I wish that I could show you some of the flood of anti-Semitic literature that is reaching my office these days. These prominent Jews do not believe in the boycott of Germany. They sense the whirlwind that is gathering and I think and hope they may take an active hand in the situation.³⁰

This was less an expression of concern for the consequences of anti-Semitism than part of the arsenal of arguments against a boycott. Brundage was in fact willing to cultivate anti-Semitic feeling to finance the Olympic team. In a strategy letter to his AOC executive colleagues he calculated that "the fact that the Jews are against us will arouse interest among thousands of people who have never subscribed before, if they are properly approached."³¹ Brundage also hoped to convince affluent Jews that only their generous economic support could avert the looming anti-Semitic storm. Such was the note on which Brundage personally appealed for funds to Jewish advertising mogul Albert Lasker:

A large number of misguided Jews still persist in attempting to hamper the activities of the American Olympic Committee. The result, of course, is increased support from the one hundred and twenty million non-Jews in the United States, for this is a patriotic enterprise. I regret to see this animosity built up in the colleges and other educational institutions and in the athletic clubs and organizations of this country. It will not be eradicated for a generation, if then. . . . My suggestion now is that in an endeavor to offset the growing [sic] indignation and resentment to which I have referred, that some Jewish group or committee assist the American Olympic Committee in its campaign to finance the American team. If the records showed contributions of \$50,000 to \$75,000 from Jewish sources, it might be useful in the future.³²

Albert Lasker replied unsympathetically and to the point:

As an American I resent your letter and your subtle intimations of reprisals against Jews. You gratuitously insult not only Jews but the millions of patriotic Christians in America, for whom you venture to speak without warrant, and whom you so tragically misrepresent in your letter.³³

By late 1935, Brundage publicly blamed Jews for the boycott campaign,

³⁰ Brundage to Kirby, 11 Nov. 1935, ABC. See also Brundage to Abrahams, 13 Oct. 1934, ABC; Brundage to John C. Grover, 10 June 1935, ABC; Brundage to Kirby, 15 July 1935, ABC; Brundage to Edstrom, 29 Aug. 1935, ABC; Brundage to Kirby, 5 Oct. 1935, ABC.

³¹ Brundage to Kirby, Rubien, Raycroft, 22 Jan. 1935, ABC.

³² Brundage to Albert Lasker, 30 Mar. 1936, ABC.

³³ Lasker to Brundage, 14 Apr. 1936, ABC.

especially those "with communistic and socialistic antecedents," and regarded himself as their personal target.³⁴ His letters to German Olympic officials, who wrote for reassurance about American intentions with each new wave of anti-Olympic expression, conveyed a new tone of fellow-suffering. In late October he drafted the following letter to von Tschammer:

May I assure you at once, my dear Herr von Tschammer und Osten, that personally, I have never had misgivings or doubts that Germany will not rigorously follow the rules of the IOC. It is because I have remained steadfast in my belief and because I have maintained faith in the integrity of the promises made to me, that so much abuse is being heaped on me . . . In fact, the sordidness of the attacks against me and the lowly methods in the futile efforts pursued to block American participation have caused me to become more resolute than ever and I shall fight grimly to the very end.³⁵

Brundage's characterization of the opposition changed with the needs of his argument. Sometimes the "enemy" was "the well disciplined forces of approximately twenty million Catholics and more than four million Jews," a specter to swamp true Americans with the greedy clamor of ethnic and minority politics. Sometimes only a few unrepresentative individuals were causing all the trouble.³⁶ In either case, since American media were largely controlled by Jewish owners, advertisers and reporters, nothing in the newspapers about the German situation could be credited.³⁷

Visiting abroad in August 1935, Fred Rubien had reported that preparations for the German Games far exceeded anything in the past, a proof to Brundage of the efficiency and seriousness with which the Germans approached their tasks as Olympic hosts. Rubien also reported that the Germans seemed more prosperous and content than their French neighbors, and that "people there [Germany] seem to feel that Hitler has made great progress, but his subordinates are the cause of much of the trouble."³⁸ In November, Baillet-Latour wrote triumphantly to Brundage of an audience the Fuhrer had granted him, and of an important promise he had received:

³⁴ Brundage to Edstrom, 29 Aug. 1935. As early as 1 May 1933, Brundage had used this explanation in a letter to Lewald, ABC.

³⁵ This letter was not sent. A very personal letter containing strong opinions and marked "proposal," it is attached in Brundage's files to the carbon of a letter to Hans von Tschammer und Osten dated 28 Oct. 1935, ABC. I quote it here because I believe it more nearly conveys Brundage's true feelings in the matter. See also Brundage to Karl Ritter von Halt, 7 Feb. 1939, ABC.

³⁶ Compare Brundage to von Tschammer und Osten, "proposal," 28 Oct. 1935, ABC, and Brundage to James Simms, 29 Oct. 1935 (misdated; internal evidence indicates date should be 29 Aug. 1935), ABC, with Brundage to Grover, 10 June 1935, ABC.

³⁷ Brundage to Robert J. Eustace, 23 Sept. 1935, ABC.

³⁸ Rubien to Brundage, 18 Aug. 1935, ABC.

every poster or placard which might hurt the feelings of those coming to the Games will disappear from Berlin, Munich or Garmisch. It is a success, because that has nothing to do with sport itself and the IOC had no right to require it.³⁹

Such evidence enabled Brundage to dismiss press reports and suggestions that he had been grossly deceived by the Germans. "I flatter myself that I am old and experienced enough to be able to detect attempts to 'pull the wool' over my eyes," he wrote Gus Kirby. "Judging Germany from distorted sensational news articles and propaganda is quite different from inspecting the country as it is. You heard my lengthy report and saw the evidence that I brought back with me."⁴⁰

Of all Brundage's closest advisers, perhaps only Kirby was permitted to suggest seriously that the German situation was perilous for the rest of the world.⁴¹ Kirby's devotion to American participation proceeded from a deep conviction that a successful sportsmanlike Olympics could lighten the evil burden which had descended upon the Jews in Germany. Kirby took no vindictive pleasure in besting the opposition as Brundage did. "I take it that the fundamental difference between you and me is that you are a Jew hater and Jew baiter and I am neither," he once wrote Brundage, who responded that he was too busy to hate any group.⁴² Kirby believed Hitler would soon push things to a point beyond which his people would not follow him. The Games, he felt, would give German youth a first-hand knowledge of Jews and Catholics entirely at odds with their own government's propaganda.⁴³ In the meantime, the siting of the Olympics had set in motion an amelioration of Jewish persecution which might well become permanent, and he was disappointed that his Jewish friends did not see this. "I honestly believe," he wrote Brundage in 1936:

that the Jews ought to be everlastingly thankful to the American Olympic Committee, to the American Athletic Union, and to me, for having both ameliorated and put off the evil days of their persecutions.⁴⁴

To Iphigene Sulzberger, *grande dame* of the *New York Times*, he wrote:

To be sure, it is never pleasant to feel that the evil day is just being put off, but

³⁹ Baillet-Latour to Brundage, 17 Nov. 1935, ABC.

⁴⁰ Brundage to Kirby, 22 Apr. 1935, ABC.

⁴¹ For example, Kirby to Brundage, 14 Aug. 1935, ABC.

⁴² Kirby to Brundage, 27 May 1936, ABC; Brundage's reply in Brundage to Kirby, 1 June 1936, ABC.

⁴³ Kirby to Mrs. Arthur Hays Sulzberger, 29 Oct. 1935, ABC, and Kirby to Untermyer, 8 July 1935, ABC.

⁴⁴ Kirby to Brundage, 27 May 1936, ABC.

long experience has taught most of us that not infrequently during the putting off period, conditions so change that the evil never eventuates.⁴⁵

And to Harry Anderson, chairman of an Olympic fund raising committee in Hartford, Connecticut, "It is like the cessation of hostilities during the period of the ancient Olympics. For heaven's sake, what more can the Jews ask for?"⁴⁶

Brundage's interpretation of the progress and significance of the boycott campaign reflected both the actual movement of events and the temperament once described by Clarence Bush, Brundage's publicity director for the 1936 Games. Brundage possessed, Bush wrote, "a combative emotional reaction pattern, not mere stubbornness, but a disposition to regard an attack as calling first for defense and second for counter-attack. Surrender without battle to the finish is utterly foreign to this life pattern."⁴⁷ As the boycott campaign wore on, Brundage's opposition to it metamorphosed accordingly.

Late in September 1935, his public and private statements became sharply more aggressive and uncompromising.⁴⁸ In part Brundage was reacting to the growing volume and intensity of boycott rhetoric, reflecting a new alarm about the Kurfurstendamm riots of 15 and 19 July in which Jews were physically assaulted in the streets of the host city for the Olympics, and the Nuremberg Decrees of September 15th, depriving Jews of German citizenship. This new militancy fostered a corresponding belligerence in the president of the AOC. "It is time we took an aggressive stand, and you will hear more from me anon on this subject," he wrote Gus Kirby in September.⁴⁹ "These attacks by the enemies of sport, for that is what they are, are beginning to make me angry," he complained to Fred Rubien.⁵⁰ When Brundage's chosen successor to the AAU presidency, New York State Supreme Court judge Jeremiah T. Mahoney, a former Olympic athlete and a Catholic, became a candidate for mayor of New York (this was Brundage's explanation for Mahoney's energetic public opposition to American participa-

⁴⁵ Kirby to Mrs. Sulzberger, 21 Apr. 1936, ABC.

⁴⁶ Kirby to Harry Anderson, 1 May 1936, ABC.

⁴⁷ Clarence Bush, "Hard to Push Around," undated, p. 3, ABC. Bush was of the same mind as Brundage in his dedication to Olympic independence and his distrust of Jews and Easterners.

⁴⁸ The shift is rather precise. A letter expressing great concern and anxiety about the boycott campaign was sent by Brundage to Baillet-Latour, 24 Sept. 1935, ABC. A letter from Brundage to Gus Kirby, 27 Sept. 1935, ABC, indicates that Brundage had had a significant change of heart. That conclusion is supported by subsequent correspondence. See Brundage to Baillet-Latour, 30 Oct. 1935, ABC; Brundage to William J. Bingham, 5 Nov. 1935, ABC.

⁴⁹ Brundage to Kirby, 27 Sept. 1935, ABC.

⁵⁰ Brundage to Rubien, 5 Oct. 1935, ABC.

tion⁵¹), and vigorously took up the boycott cudgels, promising to take the issue to the floor of the upcoming AAU convention in New York, Brundage's counter-offensive began in earnest.

The new tone appeared in a statement to the press on the eve of the convention. Brundage reported the results of a mail poll of 139 athletes who had placed first, second, and third in national AAU Games and the National Collegiate Athletic Association outdoor championships, or who already held Olympic records. All but one were in favor of American participation. Brundage's conclusion was in accord with his new perspective:

To those alien agitators and their American stooges who would deny our athletes their birthright as American citizens to represent the United States in the Olympic Games in Germany, our athletes reply in the modern vernacular, "oh yeah!"⁵²

At the convention Brundage and his colleagues defeated the effort of the boycotters on a controversial vote.⁵³ That battle proved to be one of the last organized boycott efforts, but the equilibrium of victory was delicate. Vigilance was necessary to preserve a fragile public success and to promote a congenial atmosphere for fund raising. Following the convention, worried AOC officials tried to impress their German counterparts with the importance of their image abroad. Clarence Bush had written pointedly to the Secretary-General of the German Organizing Committee, Carl Diem:

In the vernacular, "lay off" gloating over our participation victories. It seems that each time Mr. Brundage has made a bold stroke for participation, this has evoked a story from Germany capitalizing on it for the benefit of Nazi propaganda. This has given the anti-Nazi forces in the country the chance to say "I told you so," which has been embarrassing to Mr. Brundage and our entire campaign. For example, when he won the AAU battle in New York, the propaganda minister in Germany announced the Olympic Games would be made the subject of a propaganda film. This was carried by half a column adjacent to the story of Brundage's victory, and detracted a great deal from it. . . . Mr. Brundage said I could write to you frankly on this, and I have risked it because it is very important.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Brundage to Baillet-Latour, 24 Sept. 1935.

⁵² "Brundage Scores 'Alien Agitators'," *New York Times*, 4 Dec. 1935.

⁵³ "AAU Backs Team in Berlin Olympic; Rejects Boycott," *New York Times*, 9 Dec. 1935. The question on the floor was whether American participation in the Olympics should be tied to a demand for a new investigation of the German situation. The vote was close – 55.75 for, 58.25 against – and controversial. Two kinds of bodies voted. The district governing bodies, the heart of the AAU, voted with the boycott supporters. The affiliated bodies, with the exception of the Jewish Welfare Board, voted with Brundage. The controversy concerned the legal voting status of the affiliated bodies which had made victory for the Brundage forces possible.

⁵⁴ Bush to Carl Diem, 26 Dec. 1935, ABC.

But it was out of Diem's hands. "You can imagine," he replied obliquely, "that it is rather difficult for us to help you. However, we shall do all we can and shall find ways and means."⁵⁵

In September, Dietrich Wortmann, the energetic and apostolic head of the German-American Olympic fund-raising Committee, had tried to persuade Goebbels himself to give permission for a goodwill tour of the States by boxer Max Schmeling and lawn tennis champion Gottfried von Cramm, and possibly even a German soccer team. Convinced that personalities appealed to Americans "as nothing else," Wortmann hoped to defuse anti-German propaganda resulting from "various events which do not meet with the approval of certain international elements," he wrote in the elliptic fashion common to many Nazi supporters, as though direct statements would imperil the shared secret. "I am appealing to Your Excellency, as Minister of Propaganda and Enlightenment because you will appreciate the necessity of propaganda favorable to Germany."⁵⁶

Other AOC officials were less confident about German sensitivity to world opinion. As the winter teams sailed, Gus Kirby phrased a careful letter to Carl Diem in which he warned of the consequences of any friction arising in the brush of athletes, visitors, and spectators. Perhaps some troublemaker would vent his anti-Hitler prejudices publicly. "If such would happen and this improper and disorderly person were thereafter roughly treated or thrown into jail, as well he should be," Kirby wrote, the event could be badly exaggerated. "The exercise of great forbearance and patience may have to be used." Equally, he continued:

It might be that some of your over-radical element and of course there is always that element in every country, might in public say something to some Jewish member of the team or to one of the personnel accompanying the team which would give that person seeking just such insults an opportunity of magnifying a proverbial mole into the mountain.⁵⁷

This painstakingly worded letter underscored several things about the dealings of American Olympic officials with the Germans. Excepting Wortmann, a New Germany enthusiast, the Americans really did not trust the Germans to behave impartially, and with varying degrees of urgency, continually appealed to them to practice restraint. In order to make their counsel heard they adopted the fiction that any challenge to the official German interpretation of reality proceeded from whim rather than responsible concern. German political sensitivities were deferred to in advance; the Americans

⁵⁵ Diem to Bush, 20 Jan. 1936, ABC.

⁵⁶ Dietrich Wortmann to Josef Goebbels, 5 Sept. 1935, ABC.

⁵⁷ Kirby to Diem, 6 Jan. 1936, ABC.

only respectfully requested from the side that the Germans be magnanimous. Even rules which permitted the arrest of political dissenters were accepted deadpan; according to the rationale of legalism, it was enough that they were the rules. No question of their legitimacy would be publicly aired.

Inevitably this was an unstable balancing act. When AAU secretary-treasurer Daniel Ferris wrote to Brundage early in 1936 criticizing an IAAF decision which permitted German authorities to name all judges for track and field events at Berlin, the rules in the game Brundage himself had set up were unquestionably on Ferris's side:

One of the strong arguments you and others made when the Jewish question was on was that the officiating would be handled by neutral officials and that the Germans would have no more to do with officiating than the officials of any other country.⁵⁸

To avoid a potentially explosive and at the least embarrassing situation, Brundage drafted a delicate appeal to Diem. In a letter he acknowledged that the case for American participation had included the promise of impeccably neutral referees. But he blunted the moral imperative of that agreement by implicitly denying that the need to avoid even the appearance of biased officiating was the principal reason for requesting an adjustment:

Personally, I do not care, since I would much rather sit in the stand above where I could see the races. However, it will break the hearts of many like Colonel Dieges, Gus Kirby and Fred Rubien, Dan Ferris and others, who have officiated at the Olympic Games for the last 20 years or more. I presume the idea was to get rid of the necessity of employing incompetent officials who happen to be attending the Games in some official capacity. However, such a policy will nullify one of our arguments and will create personal feelings in some quarters.⁵⁹

A legitimate concern for the rules had been presented as a childish and appealing whim of Olympic veterans which might be generously indulged.

By the time the largest team ever to represent the United States sailed on 15 July 1936, more money had also been raised to finance it than ever before – in excess of a quarter of a million dollars.⁶⁰ Raising funds in an economy beset by depression and buffeted by what Clarence Bush described as “boy-cott sabotage, flood, drouth and other relief demands, political campaigns and war scares” occasioned by the remilitarization of the Rhineland was no easy task.⁶¹ A week before the Summer Games opened, Kirby confided to a

⁵⁸ Daniel Ferris to Brundage, 12 March 1936, ABC.

⁵⁹ Brundage to Diem, 24 Mar. 1936, ABC.

⁶⁰ See “Statement of the Receipts and Disbursements of the AOC Games Committees,” 31 Dec. 1936, and enclosure in Kirby to Brundage, 30 Dec. 1936, AOC.

⁶¹ Bush, “Hard to Push Around,” p. 2, ABC.

sympathetic newspaper editor his belief that the greatest threat to the finance campaign had been press blackmail by Jewish department store advertisers. "We received numerous reports of pressure against Olympic publicity," he wrote, "and feel sure there were many more instances not reported, as well as fear where no overt action was taken. Many of our fund-raising chairmen were frightened into resigning."⁶²

III

The narrative of the Games is a familiar one. German athletes won the greatest number of gold medals, and Americans took the greatest number of medals in track and field events, the heart of the Olympics and of American affections. Jesse Owens's four gold medals – three in individual events and one in team relay – proved that the world's greatest athlete was not an Aryan. Two other black Americans, Ralph Metcalfe and John Woodruff, also won gold medals. Although Hitler demonstrated to Germans that the rest of the world would do him the honor of accepting his hospitality, he suffered several embarrassments at the hands of IOC officials. One of these occurred when Baillet-Latour insisted on the removal of swastikas and anti-Semitic posters Hitler had permitted to remain in the streets of Garmisch in defiance of his publicized promise. According to the recent testimony of Lord Noel-Baker, then an Olympic-caliber athlete who had boycotted the 1936 Games as an act of personal conscience, "the fact was known to [the German] nation within a day."⁶³

Amid the lavish German hospitality laid on for the Americans in appreciation of their contribution to the success of the Games, Brundage was singled out as a source of hope by desperate people whose estimation of the prospects for Jews in Germany was quite different from Gus Kirby's. Brundage's files contain a letter in English from the "Volksfront Deutschlands" addressed to him at the Hotel Adlon, Berlin, dated August 1936. The authors of this document portrayed the Olympic spectacle as a monstrous political deception, and appealed to Brundage to carry the hidden meaning of Hitler's Olympics to an unperceiving world:

The Olympiad goes under the heading of a "peaceful competition". Everything is well, exceedingly well organised; you find magnificent grounds for the plays, the sportsmen are excellently trained but all this is not done for a peaceful competition,

⁶² Kirby to Holmes, 24 July 1936, ABC.

⁶³ Philip Noel-Baker, "Olympics: too precious to be ruined by politics," *The Guardian*, 17 Mar. 1980.

everything is political propaganda, chiefly meant to impress the foreign visitor who upon his return will advertise nothing but a Germany of wealth, order, security, hospitality and perfect organisation. The splendid Technique may seem harmless to-day, but to-morrow it will become dangerous when all its powers will be used to organise a fight not with but against the other nations that will be anything but peaceful. . . .

The real sense of the Olympic Games will be invisible to the average visitor; the monstrous [sic] terror forbids the Germans to open their mouths and the enormous burden pressing on the German folk will be further borne in silence.

An army of brave men whose ideal it was to fight for a peaceful competition and understanding with the other nations is being kept in prisons and concentration camps – a countless number – and it will be impossible for the foreigner coming from a country of democratic liberty to imagine the sufferings and tortures they have had to endure. . . .

Under the enormous Nazi terror our work is difficult and we therefore beg you to help us in our task to prevent Hitler and his complices [sic] to get ready for another war. You are not included in the terror and can use your liberty to see the prisons and concentration camps. . . . Tell your countrymen what you see there.

But Brundage was not curious. His impressions of Germany were more favorable than ever, and he was not alone in them. Even Gus Kirby, who had doubted so much and still doubted, conceded two months after his return from Berlin, “No one is more enthusiastic over what Hitler has done for Germany than I am.”⁶⁴ The message Brundage carried back to the United States was the one the Nazis had intended. One of the first places he offered it was at Madison Square Garden on German Day, 4 October, in a speech of thanks for the fund raising efforts of German-Americans all across the country. In highly controversial remarks, Brundage compared the Olympic participation battle with the heroic struggle of the German people, who were also bound to triumph. “The important change,” he declared of Germany:

is in the spirit of the people. Five years ago they were discouraged and demoralized – today they are united – sixty million people believing in themselves and in their country, and sixty million hard-working, thrifty, industrious people willing to make sacrifices and willing to put up with discomfort in order to obtain their object and get somewhere.

Communism had been stamped out, and “all enemies of the country deported or interned.” There were lessons for America in this, one of which was that “alien enemies of our country who abuse our hospitality and seek to undermine our American institutions must be deported.” Communism was the alien enemy, but who might be implicated by association was less

⁶⁴ Kirby to Brundage, 13 Oct. 1936, ABC.

definite. The text of Brundage's remarks broadly condemned all those who believed that the world owed anyone a living, or who did not believe in majority rule. "Whether a vociferous minority could work their will on 120 million people," the main issue of the Olympic boycott, had by implication been a struggle against the second group of villains.⁶⁵

The press reported that Brundage had exhorted his audience to emulate the Nazis. Although it is hard to construe his full remarks differently, Brundage regarded these accounts as vicious distortions. "I deliberately mentioned neither Hitler nor the Nazis and you may imagine my surprise when I read the headlines," he wrote Gus Kirby.⁶⁶ To Karl Ritter von Halt he wrote, "Because I told them how splendidly the Games were organized, and of the wonderful reception received by the American team, I have all the Jews and Communists in the country after me."⁶⁷

In May 1937, Brundage at last found his point of view vindicated in the press. An article by Harold Lloyd Varney in *The American Mercury*, which argued that National Socialism had kept the Russian bear at bay in Europe and implied that critics of the "new order" were dupes of the Bolsheviks, greatly impressed him. Never one to do anything halfway, Brundage bought and distributed to his friends every copy of the May issue in two Chicago bookstores. He took out a two-year subscription, wrote flattering letters to author and publisher, and ordered one thousand reprints to distribute to his friends.⁶⁸

The foundation of Brundage's political world view was the proposition that Communism was an evil before which all other evils were insignificant. A collection of lesser themes basked in the reflected glory of the major one. These included Brundage's admiration for Hitler's apparent restoration of prosperity and order to Germany, his conception that those who did not work for a living in the United States were an anarchic human tide, and a suspicious anti-Semitism which feared the dissolution of Anglo-Protestant culture in a sea of ethnic aspirations. Even the most wrenching evidence of the human turmoil beneath the machine-tooled surface of the New Germany, his test case for the battle against Communism, could not reach him. It came in genteelly frantic letters from individuals hopeful that some Olympic connection would entitle them to the shield of his influence for safe conduct out of Germany.

⁶⁵ "Talk for German Day," 4 Oct. 1936, ABC.

⁶⁶ Brundage to Kirby, 26 Oct. 1936, ABC.

⁶⁷ Brundage to von Halt, 23 Nov. 1936, ABC.

⁶⁸ Brundage to Harold Lloyd Varney, 12 May 1937, ABC; Brundage to Paul Palmer, 19 July 1937, ABC. See Harold Lloyd Varney, "The Red Road to War," *American Mercury* 61 (1937), 6-18.

There was Anne-Marie Bohm, who had helped Brundage with his correspondence at his Berlin hotel, and who sought from him an affidavit to sponsor the emigration of her brother, employed at a private German banking house, "but he has no chance for the future and it is the same thing for him in other German business-houses for certain reasons."⁶⁹ When Brundage demurred, Anne-Marie, now Dr. Bohm, remonstrated, "It would be very good of you to reconsider whether you could see your way to help my brother. . . . I am afraid there is hardly any other alternative for a satisfactory solution of this all-important matter."⁷⁰ But Brundage hesitated "to assert under oath that I will guarantee that your brother will not become a burden to the American authorities. . . . Accidents are always likely to happen."⁷¹

The plight of Edgar Fried, who had organized the successful Olympia-Berlin torch relay for the 1936 Games and served the Austrian Amateur Athletic Federation for twenty-five years, for a time as vice-president, was equally desperate:

By the new German laws I am considered like a non-aryan and further have not any more chance to gain my life in Germany, so I have to leave this country. Having no relations or friends abroad, I try to come away by help of those gentlemen, which I know from the time when I have been an austrian sport-leader. . . . I had the honour to make your acquaintance at the Olympic Games of Amsterdam and met you again in Berlin 1936, but I guess you saw so many people at those occasions, that you will not be able to remember me any more. . . . You can not imagine how awful and bad my situation is at present.⁷²

A personal appeal in Fried's behalf came from the president of the Austrian AAU, who wrote:

Would it not be possible for one or two members of the Olympic Committee to procure [an affidavit]? I assure you sincerely Mr. Fried has rendered so very much for the development of the Olympic idea and for the cordial relations of American and European sportsmen, that we have to support him with all powers in the present times.⁷³

Brundage's secretary responded with the standard answer that responsibility for supporting individuals wanting to enter the United States was too great for one person to assume.

Berthold Leo Warner, seeking affidavits for himself, his wife and mother, recalled meeting Brundage at the Olympic Congress of Berlin in 1930 and

⁶⁹ Ann-Marie Bohm to Brundage, 7 Sept. 1936, ABC.

⁷⁰ Bohm to Brundage, 27 Nov. 1937, ABC.

⁷¹ Brundage to Bohm, 4 Jan. 1938, ABC.

⁷² Edgar Fried to Brundage, 14 Jan. 1939, ABC.

⁷³ Hermann Wraschtil to Brundage, 7 Mar. 1939, ABC.

renewing their acquaintance in Stockholm in 1932. He had a good immigration quota number, he explained, but no relation or friend in the United States:

I do not venture to ask you personally for your help, but perhaps you know some people, who might be able to grant myself the benefit of an affidavit. All my life I have worked and striven with my brains and my hands and I express the hope that my knowledges will enable me to do so even in future, so that the affidavit may remain a pure formula.⁷⁴

Brundage replied that he could offer little encouragement:

The number of unemployed in the United States has reached a huge figure, I think over twelve million. . . . Because there are so many people receiving relief, taxes are mounting rapidly, and this adds to our difficulties. I doubt if there will be any improvement until the administration changes and a conservative President is elected.⁷⁵

Brundage's faith in the German experiment remained firm, his political anxieties entirely insular, and he soon discovered a legalistic rationale for refusing assistance to those who turned to him. By equating their appeals for help with the unethical political self-seeking of the Olympic boycotters, whatever moral onus attached to this raw human encounter for him was deftly shifted. In the case of one Theodor Schmitt, who also needed an affidavit, Brundage's attorney pointed to the principle which stood higher than the desperation of any single human being:

It would appear to us . . . that Dr. Schmitt was attempting to use your connection with the American Olympic Committee for his personal advantage. If such is the case, it appears to me that you would be going counter to the stand that you have always taken in amateur athletics. We know that you have never used this connection for any purpose of personal advantage and have scrupulously avoided the appearance of so doing; therefore it seems to us that the execution of this affidavit or any other affidavits for the same purpose would be going counter to everything which you have done in the past.⁷⁶

A different kind of appeal came from Herbert Bocker, staff editor for a major Nazi publishing house. Bocker, a former athlete, deputy assistant to the Reichssportsfuhrer and National Socialist press correspondent during the Olympic Games, had undertaken to write a book on Olympic champions. He asked Brundage to forward letters of inquiry to nine American medal holders. Brundage passed these letters on with an approving cover letter of

⁷⁴ Berthold Leo Warner to Brundage, 20 Aug. 1938, ABC.

⁷⁵ Brundage to Warner, 8 Sept. 1938, ABC.

⁷⁶ Quoted in Brundage to Gustave Jahr, 15 Mar. 1941, ABC.

his own to five of them. The other four, he explained, had abandoned amateur sport to become professionals, "so I did not forward letters to them."⁷⁷ Brundage had fewer qualms that a book about the Olympics might be distorted by the official Nazi line than by amateurs fallen from grace.

IV

With the Berlin crisis behind them, the International Olympic Committee chose Tokyo to host the 1940 Games and started on the new task of co-ordination. Count de Baillet-Latour offered the official history of the 1936 Games to assembled IOC delegates in Warsaw in June 1937, as a platform from which to launch preparations for the XIIth Olympiad:

All of you, Gentlemen, have still present in your memories as well as the success of the Games at Berlin and Garmisch the difficulties that were met in the course of their preparation and the attempted efforts to make them fail. Why did these difficulties vanish? Why were these efforts in vain? Because the IOC had the same scruples in defending the principles of the Olympic Movement as the German authors had in respecting them: because our three German colleagues, as well as their collaborators, recognized only one law – the Olympic charter. . . .

Now Gentlemen, it is with full confidence that the IOC has confided the organisation of the next game to Japan. Possessing the same qualities of order and organisation as the Germans, like them respecting law and authority, imbued with the Olympic principles that form the faith of their athletics, the Japanese will carry out the task well.⁷⁸

As the world moved closer to war in 1937 and 1938, however, many who had followed the standard raised by Avery Brundage and the IOC into the battle over Berlin were increasingly uneasy about the choice of Tokyo as host city for the 1940 Games. William Bingham, director of athletics at Harvard and a young man of whom Brundage was very fond, was one. After much soul-searching, Bingham confided his doubts in several letters to Brundage. Hitler had come to power after the decision to award the 1936 Games had been made, he wrote, but Japan had already invaded Manchuria when the Games were awarded to her.⁷⁹ "You have been reading the newspapers, I fear," Brundage replied at the first sign of apostasy. The real villain was still Communism, which in Brundage's opinion was responsible "for

⁷⁷ Brundage to Herbert Bocker, 2 Mar. 1937, ABC.

⁷⁸ Address by Comte de Baillet-Latour to the International Olympic Committee, 34th session, Warsaw, 7 June 1937, quoted in the Official Bulletin of the International Olympic Committee, Oct. 1937, pp. 2–3, ABC.

⁷⁹ Bingham to Brundage, 7 Feb. 1938, ABC, and Bingham to Brundage, 6 June 1938, ABC.

trouble in Spain, for Hitler and Mussolini, and for the present affair in China.”⁸⁰

To desert the Games because their participants were imperfect was like saying that Christianity should be abandoned because it contained sinners, he admonished Bingham, and he expanded that argument in a press statement on 9 June 1938, on the occasion of Bingham’s protest resignation from the AOC: “If the International Olympic Committee had to find a country whose present and past history was free from war and aggression in which to hold the Olympic Games, there would be no Games.”⁸¹ In late 1938, Japan’s decision to pull out of the Games, largely because her generals needed all human and economic resources for their war machine, delivered the IOC from what had promised to become a controversy even more bitter than that of 1936.

In the end, Brundage had used three separate arguments against his opponents. Officially, he claimed only one: the necessary separation of sport and politics. By staking a principled claim to disinterestedness, he was able to proceed rhetorically as if his other two arguments were not tactically addressed to political issues. His second argument amended the claims of the first. Sport and politics must be separate, but the politics in question were not as bad as some had made out. The press had distorted both the German and Japanese situation; moreover, citizens in both societies possessed admirable traits of orderliness, efficiency, and dedication to a common goal. His third argument consisted of two self-contradictory parts. First, Americans had no right to criticize those who pursued a different philosophy of life. So he had said at a rally of the Citizens’ Keep America Out of War Committee at Soldiers’ Field in Chicago on 4 August 1940, where he introduced Charles Lindbergh with these remarks:

We must learn that we must live tolerantly in the world with other peoples who may be happy and satisfied with a different philosophy of life and who, perhaps, look askance at many of our ideas and practices. . . . Might is still right in most of the world. Have we been given a mandate to correct all these evils?⁸²

Unless, of course, the philosophy in question were Communism, against which all democratic people must ever be vigilant. Clarence Bush argued this second position in a 1938 letter to the editor of the *Washington Star*,

⁸⁰ Brundage to Bingham, 24 Jan. 1938, ABC.

⁸¹ “Statement by Avery Brundage, Chairman of the American Olympic Committee on the Resignation of W. J. Bingham,” 9 June 1938, ABC.

⁸² “Remarks of Avery Brundage, Chairman of the Citizens Keep America Out of War Committee Introducing Charles A. Lindbergh at Soldier Field on 4 August 1940,” ABC.

which succinctly presented his boss's interpretation of the political meaning of the 1936 boycott controversy and its place in a chain of events in which the incipient Tokyo boycott movement was only the latest development:

The first attempt to boycott the Olympics was when they were held in Los Angeles in 1932. There were no foreign issues to be used as false whiskers, and the placards were lettered "Kill the Capitalist Games."

Here lies the key to the boycott movements of 1936 and 1940. The key is hammer-and-sickle in design. It conceals a Pandora's box of Communists wriggling under cover. When the games were held in Berlin, the red opposition concealed itself in a JEWISH cloak, and with the games scheduled for Tokio they borrow a Chinese nightshirt.

In these two Olympiads the Communist is lucky to find causes but his real cause is hatred of Olympic philosophy. Communists find it inimical to their own ideology, which requires reducing everyone to the lowest level for regimentation. These vermin, burrowing in darkness, dislike anything healthy and wholesome, making for pleasure and happiness, vigor and power in the existing system.⁸³

As Nazism's crude racism and megalomaniac hubris represented the perversion of the Romantic Ideal, so the regimented legalism into which Avery Brundage cast the Olympic movement was a procrustean bed for the liberal tradition of protection under the law for many different points of view. Brundage did not recognize the contradiction between his defense of equal protection under the law and the intolerance of his own mid-western isolationism and Calvinist seriousness about life. In that mixture, Easterners, New Deal liberals and ethnic minorities were all ideologically suspect. Easterners were the bearers of a decadent culture geographically, historically, and ethnically closer to Europe than the rest of America. New Deal liberals championed a dangerous compassion which was only the other side of self-pity and self-indulgence, a fatal relaxation of the iron self-discipline required for the serious project of life. Ethnic minorities which defended themselves from assimilation into the WASPish mainstream compromised the spirit of the American dream, which rewarded the earnest effort to become homogeneously American.

The strict standard to which Brundage held both himself and the world was less Victorian than Puritan. He possessed the Calvinist's iron contractual sense that prized adherence to the law above all. "I hold to the strict interpretation of the rules," he once remarked. "One deviation leads to another and the first thing you know, all is hopeless confusion."⁸⁴ His legalism was grounded in a belief in the "natural law" of competition on the playing field where only merit and sacrifice were rewarded. In the language of

⁸³ Bush to editor, *Washington Star*, 20 Feb. 1938, ABC.

⁸⁴ Brundage to Kirby, 22 Apr. 1935, ABC.

classical liberalism, the Olympic ideal was the unfettered operation of the natural law on the field of sport, a normative model for all social organization.

But Brundage committed the error to which uncritical allegiance to the law is always most prone. Blind devotion to the rules overlooked the possibility that new conditions in the world might require adjustment of the rules, or adjustment in what it meant to observe them. Judge Mahoney's declaration in the heat of the boycott controversy – "This . . . is not a question of politics. It is a question of humanity" –⁸⁵ challenged Brundage to look at the human goals the law was intended to serve and the circumstances in which existing law could not serve those goals.

One of the strengths of legalism is that it protects all equally from the arbitrariness of a mighty whim. Brundage believed he was defining such an impartially protective framework in his campaign against the Olympic boycott. He never acknowledged that he had used his considerable power to manipulate and interpret Olympic rules in accord with his own harshly laissez-faire political sympathies. Except for his IOC aspirations (without which his ideology would have been the same), he did not have personal ambitions to serve. Knowing this, he counted himself free of corrupt political motives. He did not see his own vision of the Olympic mission as a political distortion of the idea of sport for sport's sake. Avery Brundage's Olympic movement was eternally mobilized against Communism, and in the intensity of his conviction he was unable to recognize the use of the Olympics as grist to the mill of Fascism. His allegiance was not truly to the law, as he imagined, but to any declared enemy of Communism. The moral dignity that might have attached to a truly neutral Olympics (and likely would have required a different conclusion about Germany's observance of Olympic protocol) was sacrificed to a thinly concealed partisanship which condoned extremism in the defense of a falsely conceived liberty.

⁸⁵ Jeremiah C. Mahoney to A. C. Gilbert, 5 Aug. 1935, ABC.