“Out of Many, One:”
An Anthology of Readings for the Honors, WoHum and PigLit Classes
Summer 2016

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PART I: THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1. Introduction: “The Berlin Olympics” from The History Place

Source: http://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/triumph/tr-olympics.htm

Adolf Hitler, who was not a sports fan, had been lukewarm toward the whole idea of hosting the 1936 Olympics. It had taken some effort by Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels to convince him that the Olympic festivities could be exploited to advance the Nazi cause both inside and outside of Germany.

The Games had been awarded to Germany by the International Olympic Committee back in May 1931, before Hitler came to power. It was the second time the modern Olympics were scheduled to be held in Germany. The 1916 Olympics scheduled for Berlin were canceled due to World War I.

Under Goebbels' direction, the Nazis intended to use the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin as a showcase for the "new Germany." The Nazis also hoped to profit from the tens of thousands of souvenir-hungry tourists who would bring much needed foreign currency into the country.

The Nazi administration spent 42 million Reich marks building an impressive 325-acre Olympics sports complex located about five miles west of Berlin. This was the same site that had been chosen for the canceled 1916 Games. The centerpiece of the new sports complex was the gigantic Olympic Stadium built of natural stone which could seat 110,000 spectators. Inside this stadium, the world's largest, there was a special seating area built for Hitler and top Nazis.

While the ambitious Olympic construction project was underway in 1934-35, huge controversy erupted over the exclusion of Jewish athletes from Germany's Olympic team.

The president of Germany's Olympic Committee, Dr. Theodor Lewald, was himself ousted from this prestigious position after it was revealed his paternal grandmother was Jewish. He was replaced by a high ranking SA man named Hans von Tscharmer und Osten.

Osten quickly established an Aryans-only policy in selecting Germany's Olympic athletes. This was in keeping with numerous Nazi rules and regulations shutting out Jews from all facets of German society. Some of the Jews excluded from the Olympic team were actually world class athletes, such as tennis star Daniel Prenn and boxer
Erich Seelig. They left Germany, along with other Jewish athletes, to resume their sports careers abroad. Prenn played tennis in England while Seelig moved to the United States. The Nazis also disqualified Gypsies, including Germany's middleweight boxing champ, Johann Trollmann.

The banning of non-Aryans from Germany's Olympic team was condemned internationally as a violation of the Olympic code of equality and fair play. The Olympics were intended to be an exercise in goodwill among all nations emphasizing racial equality in the area of sports competition. The Nazis, however, had no interest in promoting racial equality and hoped instead to use the Olympics to show off Aryan athletes, whom they believed were naturally superior because of their race.

The Nazi attitude toward the coming Olympics brought international calls for a boycott of the Berlin Games along with requests to move the Games to another country. The biggest boycott controversy occurred in the United States, the country which had sent the most athletes to past Olympics and usually won the most medals.

For years now in the U.S., various Jewish and Christian leaders had been reading newspaper accounts of Nazi persecution of Jews, Christian churches, political dissidents, labor leaders and others. Throughout Germany by this time, Jewish athletes of all ages had been banned from city playgrounds and sports facilities, gymnastic organizations, physical education programs, public swimming pools, and even from horse racing. For many American critics of the Hitler regime, the banning of Jews from Germany's Olympic team was the last straw.

The American Olympic Committee was headed by former U.S. Olympic athlete, Avery Brundage, who initially supported the idea of a boycott of the Berlin Olympics. He also sympathized with the hardline position taken by leaders of America's powerful Amateur Athletic Union calling for a boycott unless the Nazis allowed German Jews to fully participate.

The Nazis attempted to smooth things over by inviting Brundage to Germany and took him to see special training courses supposedly set up for use by Jews in Germany. Brundage was favorably impressed by what he saw and also by the extra-special VIP treatment he was given by the Nazis. As a result, Brundage returned to America and announced on September 26, 1934, that the American Olympic Committee officially accepted the invitation to participate in the Berlin Olympics.

The Amateur Athletic Union, however, was not so easily swayed. Its leader, Jeremiah Mahoney, declared that American participation in the Berlin Games meant nothing less than "giving American moral and financial support to the Nazi regime, which is opposed to all that Americans hold dearest."
The outspoken Mahoney was supported in his position by various American Jewish and Christian leaders, along with liberal politicians such as New York Governor Al Smith. Forty-one college presidents also voiced their support for a boycott. In addition, America's trade union leaders supported an Olympic boycott and also pushed for a complete economic boycott of Nazi Germany. They were strongly anti-Hitler as a result of the systematic dismemberment of Germany's trade unions by the Nazis.

Responding to the mounting international pressure, the Nazis made a token gesture by allowing a part-Jewish athlete, Helene Mayer, back on their Olympic team. She had won a gold medal at the 1928 Games and was considered to be the world's greatest female fencer. The Nazis also let the part-Jewish Theodor Lewald function as an "advisor" to Germany's Olympic Organizing Committee.

Back in the U.S., Avery Brundage responded to his own critics by claiming the Olympics were meant for "athletes not politicians." He succeeded in swaying a number of American athletes to his point of view. When the Amateur Athletic Union took its final vote on December 8, 1935, the boycott proposal was voted down by a razor-thin margin. The Americans would participate after all.

The U.S. Olympic team turned out to be its biggest ever with 312 athletes including nineteen African Americans and five Jews. The Nazis had given repeated assurances to the International Olympic Committee that black athletes would be treated well in Germany. The Nazis also reluctantly agreed to let foreign Jews participate.

However, some American Jewish athletes, including Harvard University track star Milton Green, chose to sit out the Olympics to protest Nazi anti-Semitism. Doing this meant passing up the opportunity of a lifetime in order to make a political statement. Jewish athletes from other countries also decided to sit out the Games as a protest, including star athletes from Austria, France and Canada.

In all, fifty-one countries decided to participate in the Berlin Games. This was the biggest number so far in the modern Olympic era. Germany had the largest Olympic team with 348 competitors. Soviet Russia had not participated in any of the Olympics thus far and was also absent from Berlin Games.

In mid-July 1936, the teams began arriving in Germany and were given the red-carpet treatment by their Nazi hosts with many lavish receptions held in their honor. Berliners had been repeatedly told by the Nazi administration to create a good impression by making international tourists feel welcome. The resulting over-friendliness of normally gruff Nazi Brownshirts and SS men seemed amusing to those who knew them better, such as foreign journalists stationed in Berlin.
Tourists entered a squeaky clean Berlin where all undesirable persons had been swept off the streets by police and sent to a special detention camp outside the city. Buildings everywhere were decorated with Olympic flags hung side-by-side with Nazi swastikas including all of the various facilities used for sporting competitions.

The omnipresent 'Jews Not Welcome' signs normally seen throughout Germany were removed from hotels, restaurants and public places for the duration of the Olympics. Nazi storm troopers were also ordered to refrain from any actions against Jews. The virulent anti-Semitic newspaper published by Julius Streicher called Der Stürmer was even removed from newsstands. Interestingly, visitors wanting to talk to Jews in Berlin about their daily experiences or investigate Jewish life in Nazi Germany were required to contact the Gestapo first, after which they would be closely watched until they departed.

The opening ceremony of the XI Olympic Games was held on Saturday, August 1, 1936, inside the Olympic Stadium, which was jammed to capacity. Unfortunately, the Germans did not get the usual sunny 'Führer weather' which always seemed to accompany big Nazi events, but instead got a cloudy day with occasional rain showers. Hitler and his entourage, along with the Olympic officials, walked into the stadium amid a chorus of three thousand Germans singing the Deutschland Über Alles national anthem followed by the Horst Wessel Lied Nazi anthem.

Over 5,000 athletes from 51 nations then marched in according to alphabetical order, with Greece leading the whole parade and the host country, Germany, at the end. But even the opening ceremony was not without controversy – the question being whether athletes would give the Nazi salute to Hitler as they passed by his reviewing stand. There was some confusion over this issue, since the Olympic salute with right arm held out sideways from the shoulder could also be mistaken for the Hitler stiff-arm salute. Most countries gave either one or the other. Austrian athletes gave the Hitler salute. French athletes thrilled the German audience by giving the Hitler salute, although some French athletes later claimed it was the Olympic salute. The Bulgarians outdid everyone by goose-stepping past the Führer. The British and Americans chose a military style 'eyes right' with no arm salute.

The flag bearer of every nation was supposed to dip their country's flag while passing by the Führer and the Olympic officials. The American flag bearer upset many Germans in the audience by ignoring this, adhering to the U.S. custom of only dipping to the President of the United States and no one else.

The magnificent Airship Hindenburg flew low over the stadium trailing the Olympic flag with its five rings representing the five participating continents. As a symbolic gesture, the Nazis allowed Olympics organizer Theodor Lewald to give the opening
speech, which was followed by Hitler’s simple message: "I proclaim the Games of Berlin, celebrating the eleventh Olympiad of the modern era, to be open." This was the only public utterance Hitler made during the Olympics.

Hitler’s opening proclamation was followed by the Olympic Hymn written by German composer Richard Strauss for the Games. The climax of the opening ceremony then occurred with arrival of the Olympic torch. It had been carried all the way from Olympia, Greece, by some three thousand separate relay runners over a twelve-day period. It was the first time in Olympic history this had been done.

Sporting competitions began the next day, Sunday, August 2nd, with the track and field events. During this week-long competition, the 100 and 200-meter sprints were won by Jesse Owens, an American track star from Ohio State University. He set new world records in both races. Owens went on to win four gold medals in all, setting a world record in the long jump and also helped set one in the 400-meter relay.

German broadcasters and journalists always referred to the African American Owens as "the Negro Owens." The other eighteen African American athletes were referred to as "America's Black Auxiliaries" as if they were not full-fledged team members.

Owens became an instant superstar in Berlin. German fans chanted his name whenever he entered the Olympic Stadium and mobbed him for autographs in the street. Hitler, however, never met him. On the first day of the track and field competition, Hitler had left the Olympic Stadium as rain threatened and darkness fell and missed greeting the three American medal winners in the high jump, two of whom were black. This upset Olympic officials and they advised Hitler that either he should receive all of the medal winners or none of them. Hitler decided to receive none of them from that point onward, including Owens.

International journalists covering the Olympics took note of this and speculated it was because Owens and his fellow African American athletes won so many track and field medals, fourteen in all. Some journalists went so far as to say their victories debunked the Nazi myth of Aryan racial superiority.

Owens later said he didn't feel snubbed by Hitler. According to Owens, at one point during the track and field competition he glanced up at Hitler in his box seat and the Führer stood up and waved to him, and he had waved back at Hitler.

Another big news controversy erupted in America when it was revealed that the only two Jews on the U.S. track team had been dumped at the last minute from the 400-meter relay race. On the morning of the race, Marty Glickman and Sam Stoller were informed by their head coach they would be replaced by Jesse Owens and Ralph Metcalfe.
Glickman later speculated that Avery Brundage might have pressured the American coaches to drop the Jews to avoid upsetting Hitler. As a result, Glickman and Stoller wound up sitting in the stands watching the race which they might have easily won themselves since they were superb relay runners.

Throughout the fourteen days of athletic competition Hitler maintained a deliberately low-key presence at the Olympics. This was done to please Olympic officials who did not want him to upstage the festivities. It was also a good opportunity for the Führer to appear calm and dignified among the thousands of international observers who were watching his every move. To the surprise of his top aides Hitler became genuinely interested in the various sporting matches and took great delight in every German victory.

The XI Olympic Games concluded on Sunday, August 16, with Germany as the overall victor, capturing 89 medals. The Americans came in second with 56. The Games were preserved on film by Triumph of the Will director Leni Riefenstahl. Financed by the Nazis, she brought thirty-three camera operators to the Olympics and shot over a million feet of film. It took her eighteen months to edit Olympia into a four hour film which was released in two parts beginning in April 1938.

Remarkably, the Berlin Games saw the first-ever use of television at the Olympics, although the picture reception was not very good. At the Olympic Village, where all of the male athletes lived, a large recreation building known as Hindenburg Hall had a TV room where they could watch live competitions. Seventeen other sites around Berlin also featured TV rooms.

The Olympic Village itself received rave reviews from everyone who stayed there. The 130-acre village was constructed by the German Army under the direction of Captain Wolfgang Fuerstner. It was laid out in the shape of a map of Germany and contained 140 buildings including a post office and bank. Each of the athletes' houses contained 13 bedrooms, with two athletes per room. There were two stewards always on duty in each house who spoke the athletes' native language. Training facilities in the Village included a 400-meter oval track and a full-size indoor swimming pool.

Fuerstner's Olympic Village was the finest housing ever provided to Olympic athletes up to that time. However, just before the Olympics began, Captain Fuerstner received a demotion because of his Jewish ancestry. He had to endure being second-in-command at the Village which he had brilliantly designed, while his non-Jewish successor, Lt. Col. Werner Gilsa, received the credit for his accomplishment. Two days after the Games ended, Fuerstner attended a lavish Nazi banquet held in honor of Gilsa. Afterwards, the despondent Fuerstner went back to his barracks and shot himself. The Nazis tried to
cover up his suicide by giving him a full military burial, claiming he had been killed in an auto accident.

Overall, the Berlin Olympics was a big success for the Nazis. Hundreds of international journalists acknowledged that Germany had put on the most lavish and biggest Olympics ever. Many thousands of tourists also left Germany with happy memories of the courtesy extended to them by the Nazis and the German people, as well as the fantastic facilities and precise efficiency of the whole event. The Nazis had succeeded in getting what they most wanted from hosting the Olympics – respectability.

During the closing ceremonies the president of the International Olympic Committee had issued the traditional call for the next Games, requesting "the youth of every country to assemble in four years at Tokyo, there to celebrate with us the twelfth Olympic Games."

But there would be no more Olympic Games for a dozen years. The 1940 Games scheduled for Tokyo and the 1944 Games were both canceled. Instead of competing with each other on athletic fields, the youth of many countries wound up killing each other on fields of battle in a new world war – a war Adolf Hitler was already planning.

2. From the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum


2016 marks the 80th anniversary of the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, Germany.
Nazi Germany used the 1936 Olympic Games for propaganda purposes. The Nazis promoted an image of a new, strong, and united Germany while masking the regime’s anti-Semitic and racist policies as well as Germany’s growing militarism.

For the first time in the history of the Olympic Games, people in Europe and the United States called for a boycott of the Olympics because of the host country’s abuse of human rights.

Although the boycott movement ultimately failed, it set an important precedent for future campaigns to call world attention to contemporary human rights abuses in Olympic host countries.

INTRODUCTION

For two weeks in August 1936, Adolf Hitler's Nazi dictatorship camouflaged its racist, militaristic character while hosting the Summer Olympics. Soft-pedaling its anti-Semitic agenda and plans for territorial expansion, the regime exploited the Games to bedazzle many foreign spectators and journalists with an image of a peaceful, tolerant Germany.

Having rejected a proposed boycott of the 1936 Olympics, the United States and other western democracies missed the opportunity to take a stand that—some observers at the time claimed—might have given Hitler pause and bolstered international resistance to Nazi tyranny.

With the conclusion of the Games, Germany's expansionist policies and the persecution of Jews and other "enemies of the state" accelerated, culminating in World War II and the Holocaust.

THE 1936 SUMMER OLYMPIC GAMES

In 1931, the International Olympic Committee awarded the 1936 Summer Olympics to Berlin. The choice signaled Germany's return to the world community after its isolation in the aftermath of defeat in World War I.

Two years later, Nazi party leader Adolf Hitler became chancellor of Germany and quickly turned the nation's fragile democracy into a one-party dictatorship that persecuted Jews, Roma (Gypsies), all political opponents, and others. The Nazi claim to control all aspects of German life also extended to sports.

German sports imagery of the 1930s served to promote the myth of “Aryan” racial superiority and physical prowess. In sculpture and in other forms, German artists idealized athletes' well-developed muscle tone and heroic strength and accentuated
ostensibly Aryan facial features. Such imagery also reflected the importance the Nazi regime placed on physical fitness, a prerequisite for military service.

EXCLUSION FROM GERMAN SPORTS

In April 1933, an "Aryans only" policy was instituted in all German athletic organizations. "Non-Aryans"—Jewish or part-Jewish and Romani (Gypsy) athletes—were systematically excluded from German sports facilities and associations. The German Boxing Association expelled amateur champion Erich Seelig in April 1933 because he was Jewish. (Seelig later resumed his boxing career in the United States.) Another Jewish athlete, Daniel Prenn—Germany's top-ranked tennis player—was removed from Germany's Davis Cup Team. Gretel Bergmann, a world-class high jumper, was expelled from her German club in 1933 and from the German Olympic team in 1936.

Jewish athletes barred from German sports clubs flocked to separate Jewish associations, including the Maccabee and Shield groups, and to improvised segregated facilities. But these Jewish sports facilities were not comparable to well-funded German groups. Roma (Gypsies), including the Sinti boxer Johann Rukelie Trollmann, were also excluded from German sports.

JEWISH ATHLETES

As a token gesture to placate international opinion, German authorities allowed the part-Jewish fencer Helene Mayer to represent Germany at the Olympic Games in Berlin. She won a silver medal in women's individual fencing and, like all other medalists for Germany, gave the Nazi salute on the podium. After the Olympics, Mayer returned to the United States. No other Jewish athlete competed for Germany.

Still, nine Jewish athletes won medals in the Nazi Olympics, including Mayer and five Hungarians. Seven Jewish male athletes from the United States went to Berlin. Like some of the European Jewish competitors at the Olympics, many of these young men were pressured by Jewish organizations to boycott the Games. As most did not fully grasp at the time the extent and purpose of Nazi persecution of Jews and other groups, these athletes chose to compete.

In August 1936, the Nazi regime tried to camouflage its violent racist policies while it hosted the Summer Olympics. Most anti-Jewish signs were temporarily removed and newspapers toned down their harsh rhetoric. Thus, the regime exploited the Olympic Games to present foreign spectators and journalists with a false image of a peaceful, tolerant Germany.
BOYCOTT MOVEMENTS

Movements to boycott the 1936 Berlin Olympics surfaced in the United States, Great Britain, France, Sweden, Czechoslovakia, and the Netherlands. Debate over participation in the 1936 Olympics was most intense in the United States, which traditionally sent one of the largest teams to the Games. Some boycott proponents supported counter-Olympics. One of the largest was the "People's Olympiad" planned for the summer of 1936 in Barcelona, Spain. It was canceled after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in July 1936, just as thousands of athletes had begun to arrive.

Individual Jewish athletes from a number of countries also chose to boycott the Berlin Olympics. In the United States, some Jewish athletes and Jewish organizations such as the American Jewish Congress and the Jewish Labor Committee supported a boycott. However, once the Amateur Athletic Union of the United States voted for participation in December 1935, other countries fell in line and the boycott movement failed.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE GAMES

The Nazis made elaborate preparations for the August 1–16 Summer Games. A huge sports complex was constructed and Olympic flags and swastikas bedecked the monuments and houses of a festive, crowded Berlin.

Most tourists were unaware that the Nazi regime had temporarily removed anti-Jewish signs, nor would they have known of a police roundup of Roma in Berlin, ordered by the German Ministry of the Interior. On July 16, 1936, some 800 Roma residing in Berlin and its environs were arrested and interned under police guard in a special camp in the Berlin suburb of Marzahn.

Nazi officials also ordered that foreign visitors should not be subjected to the criminal penalties of German anti-homosexuality laws.

OPENING OF THE GAMES

On August 1, 1936, Hitler opened the XIth Olympiad. Musical fanfares directed by the famous composer Richard Strauss announced the dictator's arrival to the largely German crowd. Hundreds of athletes in opening day regalia marched into the stadium, team by team in alphabetical order. Inaugurating a new Olympic ritual, a lone runner arrived bearing a torch carried by relay from the site of the ancient Games in Olympia, Greece.

Forty-nine athletic teams from around the world competed in the Berlin Olympics, more than in any previous Olympics. Germany fielded the largest team with 348
athletes. The US team was the second largest, with 312 members, including 18 African Americans. American Olympic Committee President Avery Brundage led the delegation. The Soviet Union did not participate in the Berlin Games.

**PROPAGANDA**

Germany skillfully promoted the Olympics with colorful posters and magazine spreads. Athletic imagery drew a link between Nazi Germany and ancient Greece, symbolizing the Nazi racial myth that a superior German civilization was the rightful heir of an "Aryan" culture of classical antiquity. This vision of classical antiquity emphasized ideal "Aryan" racial types: heroic, blue-eyed blonds with finely chiseled features.

Concerted propaganda efforts continued well after the Olympics with the international release in 1938 of "Olympia," the controversial documentary directed by German film maker and Nazi sympathizer Leni Riefenstahl. She was commissioned by the Nazi regime to produce this film about the 1936 Summer Games.

**GERMAN VICTORIES**

Germany emerged victorious from the XIth Olympiad. German athletes captured the most medals, and German hospitality and organization won the praises of visitors. Most newspaper accounts echoed the *New York Times* report that the Games put Germans "back in the fold of nations," and even made them "more human again." Some even found reason to hope that this peaceable interlude would endure. Only a few reporters, such as William Shirer, understood that the Berlin glitter was merely a facade hiding a racist and oppressively violent regime.

**AFTER THE GAMES**

As post-Games reports were filed, Hitler pressed on with grandiose plans for German expansion. Persecution of Jews resumed. Two days after the Olympics, Captain Wolfgang Fuerstner, head of the Olympic village, killed himself when he was dismissed from military service because of his Jewish ancestry.

Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. Within just three years of the Olympiad, the "hospitable" and "peaceable" sponsor of the Games unleashed World War II, a conflict that resulted in untold destruction. With the conclusion of the Games, Germany's expansionist policies and the persecution of Jews and other "enemies of the state" accelerated, culminating in the Holocaust.
My dear Mr. Owens:

Will you permit me to say that it was with deep regret that I read in the New York press today a statement attributed to you saying that you would participate in the 1936 Olympic games even if they are held in Germany under the Hitler regime. I trust you will not think me unduly officious in expressing the hope that this report is erroneous.

I fully realize how great a sacrifice it will be for you to give up the trip to Europe and to forego the acclaim which your athletic prowess will unquestionably bring you. I realize equally well how hypocritical it is for certain Americans to point the finger of scorn at any other country for racial or any other kind of bigotry.

On the other hand, it is my firm conviction that the issue of participation in the 1936 Olympics, if held in Germany under the present regime, transcends all other issues. Participation by American athletes, and especially by those of our own race which has suffered more than any other from American race hatred, would, I firmly believe, do irreparable harm. I take the liberty of sending you a copy of the remarks which I made at a meeting here in New York, at Mecca Temple, last evening. This sorry world of ours is apparently becoming in a fumbling way to realize what prejudice against any minority group does not only to other minorities but to the group which is in power. The very preeminence of American Negro athletes gives them an unparalleled opportunity to strike a blow at racial bigotry and to make other minority groups conscious of the sameness of their problems with ours and puts them under the moral obligation to think more clearly and to fight more vigorously against the wrongs from which we Negroes suffer.

But the moral issue involved is, in my opinion, far greater than immediate or future benefit to the Negro as a race. If the Hitlers and Mussolinis of the world are successful it is inevitable that dictatorships based upon prejudice will spread throughout the world, as indeed they are now spreading. Defeat of dictators before they become too firmly

How do your Senators and Congressmen stand on the Connally-Wagner Anti-Lynching Bill?

ENDORSED BY THE NATIONAL INFORMATION BUREAU, 215 FOURTH AVENUE, NEW YORK
entrenched would, on the other hand, deter nations which through fear or other unworthy emotions are tending towards dictatorships. Let me make this quite concrete. Anti-Semitic, anti-Catholic and anti-Negro prejudices are growing alarmingly throughout the United States. Should efforts towards recovery fail, there is no telling where America will go. There are some people who believe that a proletarian dictatorship will come. I do not believe this will happen and the course of history clearly indicates that it is not likely to happen. Instead, it is more probable that we would have a fascist dictatorship.

It is also historically true that such reactionary dictatorships pick out the most vulnerable group as its first victims. In the United States it would be the Negro who would be the chief and first sufferer, just as the Jews have been made the scapegoats of Hitlerism in Nazi Germany. Sinclair Lewis, in his last novel, IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE, has written what seems to me to be a very sound picture of what may happen.

I have written at greater length than I had intended at the outset. I hope, however, that you will not take offense at my writing you thus frankly with the hope that you will take the high stand that we should rise above personal benefit and help strike a blow at intolerance. I am sure that your stand will be applauded by many people in all parts of the world, as your participation under the present situation in Germany would alienate many high-minded people who are awakening to the dangers of intolerance wherever it raises its head.

Ever sincerely,

Secretary.

Mr. Jesse Owens
Ohio State University
Columbus,
Ohio.
4. “My Greatest Olympic Prize” by Jesse Owens


In this Readers' Digest Classic from our archives, American athlete Jesse Owens tells his stunning Olympic story about putting differences aside for the love of the Games.

Original art from Reader's Digest, October 1960

Jesse Owens amazed the world by winning four gold medals at the 1936 Olympic Games — in the 100- and 200-meter dashes, the broad jump and the 400-meter relay. When this piece was originally published in October 1960, he was an extremely active member of the Illinois Youth Commission, which sponsors local committees “dedicated to keeping youngsters active in sports and out of mischief.” Luz Long, about whom he writes here, was killed in Sicily during World War II.

It was the summer of 1936. The Olympic Games were being held in Berlin. Because Adolf Hitler childishy insisted that his performers were members of a “master race,” nationalistic feelings were at an all-time high.

I wasn’t too worried about all this. I’d trained, sweated and disciplined myself for six years, with the Games in mind. While I was going over on the boat, all I could think about was taking home one or two of those gold medals. I had my eye especially on the running broad jump. A year before, as a sophomore at Ohio State University, I’d set the
world’s record of 26 feet 8-1/4 inches. Everyone kind of expected me to win that
Olympic event hands down.

I was in for a surprise. When the time came for the broad-jump trials, I was startled to
see a tall boy hitting the pit at almost 26 feet on his practice leaps! He turned out to be a
German named Luz Long. I was told that Hitler had kept him under wraps, evidently
hoping to win the jump with him.

I guessed that if Long won, it would add some new support to the Nazis’ Aryan-
superiority theory. After all, I am a Negro. A little hot under the collar about Hitler’s
ways, I determined to go out there and really show Der Fuhrer and his master race who
was superior and who wasn’t.

An angry athlete is an athlete who will make mistakes, as any coach will tell you. I was
no exception. On the first of my three qualifying jumps, I leaped from several inches
beyond the take-off board for a foul. On the second jump, I fouled even worse. “Did I
come 3000 miles for this?” I thought bitterly. “To foul out of the trials and make a fool of
myself?”

Walking a few yards from the pit, I kicked disgustedly at the dirt. Suddenly I felt a
hand on my shoulder. I turned to look into the friendly blue eyes of the tall German
broad jumper. He had easily qualified for the finals on his first attempt. He offered me a
firm handshake.

“Jesse Owens, I’m Luz Long. I don’t think we’ve met.” He spoke English well, though
with a German twist to it.

“Glad to meet you,” I said. Then, trying to hide my nervousness, I added, “How are
you?”

“I’m fine. The question is: How are you?”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“Something must be eating you,” he said — proud the way foreigners are when they’ve
mastered a bit of American slang. “You should be able to qualify with your eyes
closed.”

“Believe me, I know it,” I told him — and it felt good to say that to someone.

For the next few minutes we talked together. I didn’t tell Long what was “eating” me,
but he seemed to understand my anger, and he took pains to reassure me. Although
he’d been schooled in the Nazi youth movement, he didn’t believe in the Aryan-
supremacy business any more than I did. We laughed over the fact that he really looked the part, though. An inch taller than I, he had a lean, muscular frame, clear blue eyes, blond hair and a strikingly handsome, chiseled face. Finally, seeing that I had calmed down somewhat, he pointed to the take-off board.

“Look,” he said. “Why don’t you draw a line a few inches in back of the board and aim at making your take-off from there? You’ll be sure not to foul, and you certainly ought to jump far enough to qualify. What does it matter if you’re not first in the trials? Tomorrow is what counts.”

Suddenly all the tension seemed to ebb out of my body as the truth of what he said hit me. Confidently, I drew a line a full foot in back of the board and proceeded to jump from there. I qualified with almost a foot to spare.

That night I walked over to Luz Long’s room in the Olympic village to thank him. I knew that if it hadn’t been for him I probably wouldn’t be jumping in the finals the following day. We sat in his quarters and talked for two hours—about track and field, ourselves, the world situation, a dozen other things.

When I finally got up to leave, we both knew that a real friendship had been formed. Luz would go out to the field the next day trying to beat me if he could. But I knew that he wanted me to do my best—even if that meant my winning.

As it turned out, Luz broke his own past record. In doing so, he pushed me on to a peak performance. I remember that at the instant I landed from my final jump—the one which set the Olympic record of 26 feet 5-5/16 inches—he was at my side, congratulating me. Despite the fact that Hitler glared at us from the stands not a hundred yards away, Luz shook my hand hard—and it wasn’t a fake “smile with a broken heart” sort of grip, either.

You can melt down all the gold medals and cups I have, and they couldn’t be a plating on the 24-carat friendship I felt for Luz Long at that moment. I realized then, too, that Luz was the epitome of what Pierre de Coubertin, founder of the modern Olympic Games, must have had in mind when he said, “The important thing in the Olympic Games is not winning but taking part. The essential thing in life is not conquering but fighting well.”

4A. Video Link: Jesse Owens at the 1936 Berlin Olympics
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=quQopJmQry4
On Monday, August 26th, at 9 p.m. ET, HBO will preview the documentary Glickman, concerning "one of the most revered sportscasters in history."

A synopsis mentions that "Before Marv Albert and Bob Costas, there was Marty Glickman. A gifted Jewish-American athlete," who went on to a pioneering and influential broadcasting career for the New York Knicks, Giants and Jets.

But there's more to the story of one of the most recognizable sports voices in New York sports history.

Glickman was involved in a historic event at the 1936 Berlin Olympics— which has since become obscured—and he will forever be inextricably tied to the emergence of legendary African-American runner Jesse Owens.

Here's the rest of that story.

On August 14, 1917, Martin "Marty" Glickman was born in the Bronx, New York to Jewish immigrant parents. He attended Brooklyn's James Madison High School where he was a prominent, nationally-dominating sprinter, according to Haaretz.

The Daily News states that Glickman was even known as the "Flatbush Flash" in his speedy Brooklyn youth.

While at Syracuse University, Glickman qualified for the 4x100 meter United States Olympic relay team. He and another Jewish sprinter, Sam Stoller, traveled overseas to Germany in 1936 to comprise one half of the relay; only, they would never get the opportunity to compete.

Between August 1 and August 16, the Summer Olympic Games were hosted in Berlin—in Nazi Germany; Hitler's Germany.

The ceremonies commenced in the Nazi regime-built Olympic Stadium—the 110,000-capacity mammoth constructed under Joseph Goebbels' direction to showcase Aryan supremacy and a "New Germany," as The History Place point out.
Just before the trials of the 4x100 meter relay, however, Glickman and Stoller—then a student at the University of Michigan—were replaced.

Two new American sprinters took the place of the two Jewish-American student-athletes.

The new-look foursome went on to win gold in the event, set a world record (39.8 seconds) that stood for 20 years and entered the annals of U.S. sports lore forever.

The names of the replacement runners?

Jesse Owens and Ralph Metcalfe—both famous African-American athletes and sprinters.

The 1936 games created the legend of Jesse Owens because he won a stunning four gold medals, earning the distinction as the most decorated athlete in the Olympiad.

The fourth gold medal was that 4x100 relay.

One of the longstanding myths of those Berlin games regards Hitler's alleged racist snubbing of Owens upon claiming his first gold medal in the 100 meters.

The Chancellor was said to have purposely avoided recognizing Owens' achievements—despite shaking hands with the other competitors—since the notion of a victorious and formidable African-American threatened Nazi claims to a superior race.

But that myth has been numerously countered, as in this *Daily Mail* article, in which Allan Hall states of the 1936 allegation:

Or so the story goes.

But now a veteran sports reporter in Germany has come forward to claim that, though Hitler did indeed leave the stadium after the race, it was not before shaking Owens' hand.

Siegfried Mischner, 83, claims that Owens carried around a photograph in his wallet of the Fuehrer doing just that.

Not only does this truth mitigate the supposed racism toward Owens, but it also underscores the forgotten side of the story: the overt anti-Semitism against Glickman and his teammate; but not solely by Nazi Germany.
The Jewish-Americans were replaced and snubbed by the decisions of their own country's Olympic committee.

As The Daily News reports, the HBO documentary brings something else to light:

James L. Freedman, the producer of a documentary called “Glickman” that makes its HBO debut on Aug. 26, says USOC chairman Avery Brundage replaced Glickman and another Jewish athlete, Sam Stoller, at the last minute to appease Adolf Hitler.

The picture is further muddled by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's positing, on the other hand, that "Various reasons were given for the change. The coaches claimed they needed their fastest runners to win the race;" but then also concurring, in part, with The Daily News, that "Glickman has said that Coach Dean Cromwell and Avery Brundage were motivated by antisemitism and the desire to spare the Führer the embarrassing sight of two American Jews on the winning podium."

Denying reasons of anti-Semitism, a 21-year-old Stoller simply recorded "the incident in his diary as 'the most humiliating episode' in his life," according the Memorial Museum's website.

But as The Daily News writes, the documentary's producer, Freedman, claims some additional condemning insight: "But wait, there’s more: Freedman says Hitler rewarded Brundage two years later by giving Brundage’s construction company the contract to build the German embassy in Washington, D.C."

Glickman, as will be documented on August 26, went on to enlist in the Marines during World War II, which, among other consequences, resulted in the collapse of Hitler's Third Reich by 1945.

Following the war, he embarked on an extremely successful broadcasting career, covering New York sports and even "[endearing] himself to New Yorkers as the voice of Giants football during their 'golden age' of the '50s and '60s," according to HBO.com.

He coined catchphrases like the staccato "swish" and invented much of the terminology in broadcasting still in use today.

Glickman passed away on January 3, 2001, and as the documentary's web page explains in part below, his inability to compete on the United States Track and Field Team because of his religion did not prevent him from attempting to open doors for others later in life:

[He] devoted his life to helping kids, as well as working with New York City high schools and the Police Athletic League, among others. Marty Glickman was a lifelong
advocate of sports as a means of transcending divisions created by race, class and religion.

This forgotten story of the 1936 Olympics is an extremely interesting one, and its link to Jesse Owens' emergence on the world stage is even more intriguing.

This upcoming documentary and the ensuing discourse should help in ensuring the Jewish-American's story will not be ignored for much longer and that his legacy—beyond just his broadcasting innovations—will be emphasized more in the future.

6. “The Shameful Legacy of the Olympic Games” from
by Alex von Tunzelmann in The Guardian, 6/14/12

Source: https://www.theguardian.com/film/2012/jun/14/shameful-legacy-olympics-1936-berlin

In 1936, Berlin hosted the Olympics and Hitler asked director Leni Riefenstahl to film them. The result was a cinematic coup, but with sinister overtones.

'The English attack, but the Germans are still in the lead," says the commentator as two Olympic rowing fours skim over the rippling water. "The English raise the tempo … They want to win again. But Germany is stronger. Germany wins!" The victorious boat glides past the spectator stands, and the four German athletes stick their arms out straight, just above head-height, in a proud Nazi salute.

This was the Berlin Olympics of 1936, immortalized in two films by the controversial director Leni Riefenstahl. Olympia Part I: Festival of the Nations and Part II: Festival of Beauty, both released in 1938, represent a tremendous aesthetic and technical cinematic achievement.

But they also represent something far more sinister. As Londoners obliged to pay extra taxes for the 2012 Games have been repeatedly told, the Games may bequeath a permanent legacy. There is perhaps no more famous attempt to create an Olympic legacy than Riefenstahl's Olympia. When Germany could not repeat its rowing victory over England on the battlefields of the Second World War, the way Germans viewed the Olympic heritage of Berlin changed. Olympia did not endure as a monument to the glory of the Nazi superman, but as an all-too-permanent embarrassment.

Olympia is such a striking piece of Nazi pageantry that it is easy to forget Adolf Hitler had not wanted to host the Olympics. Berlin was awarded the 1936 Games in the days of the Weimar Republic. Two years later, in 1933, Hitler came to power. Olympian
ideals of peaceful competition and internationalism repulsed the Nazis – as did the prospect of Jewish, Slav or black athletes competing against whites. Official Nazi newspaper Völkischer Beobachter declared that allowing black athletes to compete "is a disgrace and a degradation of the Olympic idea without parallel". At Berlin, it decreed, "blacks must be excluded." Still, the German National Olympic Committee persuaded Hitler that even a Games that included non-Aryan athletes could be turned to Germany's advantage. Riefenstahl was commissioned to direct what was originally supposed to be one film. The previous year, she had directed the ultimate Nazi propaganda movie, *Triumph of the Will*. At its premiere, the grateful Hitler had pressed a bouquet of lilacs into her arms. She was, he declared, the "perfect German woman".

*Olympia*’s opening layers the inevitably Wagnerian score of composer Herbert Windt over cinematographer Willy Zielke’s tracking shots of ancient Greek monuments. One of antiquity's most famous statues, Myron's Diskobolos, dissolves into nude Teutonic decathlete Erwin Huber recreating the discus-throwing pose. The film's focus on "perfect" bodies is sometimes cited as an example of its distinctly fascist aesthetic, but that case can be overstated. As the American academic Michael Mackenzie pointed out, "the camera's fascination with the athletic body cannot be differentiated in any meaningful way – on stylistic grounds – from subsequent sports photography." Another of Riefenstahl's fleet of cinematographers, Hans Scheib, was responsible for the technically brilliant close-up filming of athletes and spectators in the crowd, achieved with a 600mm Leica lens.

Though these sporting images might in themselves have been neutral, their compilation in Riefenstahl's *Olympia* subtly underlined a tenet of all authoritarian regimes: that individuals must be turned into machines that act as required, but do not think. At no point do the sportsmen and women in *Olympia* speak.

After the war, Riefenstahl – who hoped her films would continue to be shown – claimed that the Nazi government had no influence on *Olympia*. This was untrue. The Nazi government commissioned and financed the films. Propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels’ diaries indicate that he was in contact with Riefenstahl about their progress, though not always positively. "It is impossible to work with this wild woman," he wrote on one occasion. Wild though she may have been, the films are utterly compliant. The fact that *Olympia* depicts such moments as the field hockey final, in which India defeated Germany, is sometimes mistaken by Riefenstahl's defenders as evidence of her editorial independence. It is the opposite. Riefenstahl's inclusion of the occasional German defeat fits squarely with Goebbels' instructions to the German press during the Games, which were to create an impression of Nazi faiemindedness by reporting foreign as well as German victories.
The Nazi obsession with race is constantly restated. "Two black runners against the strongest of the white race," muses Olympia's commentator as he surveys the field for the men's 800m. On that occasion the black runners, the US's John Woodruff and Canada's Phil Edwards, took gold and bronze respectively.

The most exhilarating section of the first *Olympia* film is the long-jump final, in which black American athlete Jesse Owens faces the white German champion Luz Long. In the last of three jumps, Long hits 7.87m: a new European record. The crowd is ecstatic, as is Hitler himself, who is shown applauding his champion. Then it is Owens's last jump. He composes himself. Sprints. Flies. Lands lightly in the sand. It's 8.06m, a new Olympic record (Owens already held the world record, having jumped 8.13m in 1935).

Tactfully, Riefenstahl does not show Hitler's reaction to Owens's spectacular achievement. According to Albert Speer, the Führer was "highly annoyed", but rationalized Owens's success within the terms of his pseudoscientific race theories. "People whose antecedents came from the jungle were primitive, Hitler said with a shrug; their physiques were stronger than civilized whites."

Riefenstahl claimed that Goebbels did not want her to show black athletes in the final film but, in the context of Hitler's remarks, it is hard to argue that there was anything subversive about the way she depicted them. The only shot that might have raised Nazi eyebrows is when Owens wins the long jump. For a moment, he makes direct eye contact with the camera, and smiles a bashful, slightly goofy smile. In a film that permits its subjects little by way of individualism, this looks almost like an acknowledgement that he is a human being.

Being treated as less than fully human was, of course, nothing new to Owens. At his alma mater, Ohio State University, he was not allowed to live on campus. Interracial sporting competition was banned in the American south, so none of the American Olympic Committee's qualifying events could be held in states such as Owens's native Alabama. President Franklin D Roosevelt refrained from sending black athletes the conventional telegram of congratulation on their victories, prompting Owens to declare: "Hitler didn't snub me – it was FDR who snubbed me."

If Owens was the star of the first Olympia film, though, the star of the second was white American Glenn Morris, whose physical form is as noticeably lingered on by Riefenstahl on film as it was in real life. In her memoirs, she wrote that Morris, who took gold in the decathlon, pounced on her during the medals ceremony. "Never before had I experienced such passion," she remembered breathlessly. Their brief affair was useful when she realized she had neglected to film Morris's victory in one decathlon event: the 5,000m run. So besotted was Morris with this "perfect German woman" that he agreed to run another 5,000m the following day, just for her cameras. It is these
staged shots, not Morris's competition run, that have ended up in the film. His starring role in *Olympia* inspired Morris to dream of silver-screen stardom; but his 1938 performance in *Tarzan's Revenge* put a stop to that.

Riefenstahl, too, hoped *Olympia* would take her to Hollywood. On 4 November 1938, she arrived in New York to promote *Olympia*. Her timing could hardly have been worse. Five days later came the horrors of Kristallnacht. Reports from Germany told of 1,000 synagogues burned in one night, and 30,000 Jews dragged off to concentration camps. A defiant Riefenstahl told reporters that she did not believe such things could have happened. Even when the German consul in New York told her the stories were true, she vowed to brazen it out in the US until "this damn Jewish thing is no longer in the headlines".

It stayed in the headlines, and the invitations she had received before Kristallnacht from Hollywood players, including Louis B Mayer, vanished. Only one studio boss still agreed to meet her: Walt Disney.

When war broke out in 1939, the prints of *Olympia* were seized from the German embassy in London. The reels were signed over to the British Army Kinema Corporation. In the spirit of "make do and mend", army editors snipped out the Nazi bits, and recut Riefenstahl's footage of athletes into shorts to use as information films during the physical training of British recruits.

Olympic parks, as those of Athens 2004 and Beijing 2008 have demonstrated, swiftly decay if neglected. But Riefenstahl's *Olympia* will not go away. Captured on celluloid, the athletes' muscles still tense as they did on a sunny 1936 day in the sharp focus of Scheib's telephoto lens. The Olympic bell, featuring a German eagle clutching the five rings in its talons, still tolls. Beneath his toothbrush moustache, Hitler still smiles. Despite multiple recuttings by Riefenstahl to minimize or remove the overtly Nazi footage, *Olympia* remains the permanent legacy that the Olympics would surely rather forget.

**6A. Video Link: Opening Sequence of Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will* (1935)**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yl2iIHRE1ng

**6B. Video Link: Opening Ceremonies from Riefenstahl’s *Olympia* (1938)**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dVlaIJVAUq4
7. “Six Minutes in Berlin” (from Slate) by Michael J. Socolow

Source:

In 1936, nine American rowers took on the Nazis in front of Hitler and 75,000 screaming Germans. The story of the greatest Olympic race you’ve never heard of.


Photo courtesy of University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, UW2234.

Sportswriter Grantland Rice called it the "high spot" of the 1936 Olympics. Bill Henry, who called the race for CBS, said it was "the outstanding victory of the Olympic Games." The event they’re describing wasn’t staged in Berlin’s Olympic Stadium, and it had nothing to do with Jesse Owens. It took place in the suburb of Grunau, when a group of college kids from the United States took on Germany and Italy in front of Hitler and 75,000 fans screaming for the Third Reich.

The results of the 1936 Olympic regatta were the inverse of that year’s track and field competition. On the track, American men won gold in the 100, 200, 400, and 800 meters; the 4-by-100 relay; both hurdles events; and the high jump, long jump, pole vault, and decathlon. (American women also won the 100 meters and the 4-by-100 relay.) German oarsmen, however, dominated on the water, capturing five gold medals and one silver in the six races preceding the eight-oared final. When a British pair finally beat a German shell, Henry and his CBS broadcast partner Cesar Saerchinger were relieved,
according to Saerchinger’s book *Hello, America*, as they’d “had to stand up for the German anthem and the ‘Horst Wessel’ song [the Nazi party anthem] after every event, until we were nauseated.”

A few minutes before 6 p.m. on Aug. 14, the final race was about to begin. The crowd, which included Hitler, Hermann Göring, and other Nazi officials, awaited another German victory.

At the starting line, American coxswain Bob Moch looked anxiously into the face of Don Hume. Hume, the stroke of the crew, was tasked with setting the pace for the seven oarsmen rowing behind him. Yet something was very wrong. Hume's eyes remained closed for most of the warm-up, and his breathing seemed labored. Moch knew that Hume had been ill since the team arrived in Europe, but he had never seen his close friend look so listless before a big race. As the rest of the crew stirred nervously, trying to banish thoughts of the tremendous physical punishment awaiting them, Moch glanced at Hume and then across the water at the other eights. Big Jim McMillin, sitting in the five-seat, later remembered his thoughts at the starting line. "I had felt that if we rowed the best we knew how, we could get there," he told me in 2004, a year before his death at age 91. But, McMillin said, "everything went wrong from that point on."

*Adolf Hitler opens the Olympic Games, Aug. 1, 1936. (Photo courtesy U.S. National Archives.)*

The story of the 1936 Olympics remains focused on the brilliant achievements of Jesse Owens and the filmmaking of Leni Riefenstahl. But the Berlin Games were just as important for inaugurating the era of the modern Olympiad. This was the first Olympics that featured a torch relay from Mount Olympus, and the German Broadcasting Company installed the world’s most technologically sophisticated television system to broadcast the games to theaters throughout Berlin. The Germans also constructed a massive shortwave broadcast center to ensure worldwide Olympics coverage.
For the global radio audience, estimated at 300 million, the Olympics assumed a new prominence. Just four years earlier, the American radio networks (NBC and CBS) dropped live coverage of the games when the cash-strapped Los Angeles organizing committee demanded an exorbitant rights fee at the last minute. Because the Germans asked for no rights fees and offered their engineers and technical apparatus for free, Americans were able to listen to the games live for the first time.

On the morning of Aug. 14, many people in Seattle woke up excited to catch the regatta’s final event live on CBS. Those listeners had a vested interest in the race. The United States team, a crew from the University of Washington, came very close to missing the trip to Berlin. Immediately following the Huskies’ victory in the Olympic trials, the team was informed by the U.S. Olympic Committee that it needed to come up with $5,000 to pay its way to Berlin. Seeing an opening, Henry Penn Burke—chairman of the Olympic Rowing Committee and a University of Pennsylvania alum—offered to send his beloved Quakers in place of the Huskies. The sports editors of Seattle's top two newspapers, outraged on behalf of the local heroes, enlisted newsboys to solicit donations while hawking papers. With American Legion posts and Chambers of Commerce throughout the state chipping in, enough money was collected in three days to send the team to Berlin. As a consequence of the funding drive, remembered Gordon Adam, who rowed in the three-seat, "people in the city felt that they were stockholders in the operation."

The Washington crew had been rowing together for less than five months prior to the Olympics. Coach Al Ulbrickson had originally named a different group of rowers as the varsity at the start of the college season. The second boat, made up of strong but inexperienced oarsmen, knew they rowed faster than the first string and was angered by the slight. After the varsity shoved off the dock for their first practice, the angry eight carried their boat to the water silently. "We were standing about a little bit after we put the oars in the oarlock," Moch explained to me the year before he died. "Somebody said, 'You know this thing is going to fly.' "

The teammates soon devised a mantra. Quietly, they would repeat the letters L-G-B. When asked the meaning, they would explain it stood for "Let's get better." What it really meant was “Let’s go to Berlin.”

The Huskies’ first big triumph came in the Intercollegiate Rowing Association national championship in June. In that race, Washington successfully deployed its signature strategy. The Huskies always maintained a stroke rating below their opponents’, ignoring those moments when their competition opened up enormous leads. When all seemed lost, the coxswain Moch would call on Hume to raise the stroke rating. Employing near-perfect technique and synchronization, the boys would put their shell, the Husky Clipper, in a higher gear. At the IRA Championship, they sat in fifth place
after the midway point, but blasted past the competition once the sprint began. It was a dominating, intimidating performance.

A few weeks later, the Huskies cruised past the competition in the Olympic trials. After surviving the funding scare, they crossed the Atlantic on the S.S. *Manhattan* with the rest of the American Olympic team. In today’s world, where Seattle and Berlin are separated by nine hours of jet flight, it is difficult to imagine how they felt to be travelling to Europe. McMillin told me the trip was "a dream"—like most of his teammates, he had never left the state of Washington before taking up rowing.

Unlike its competition from the Ivy League, the Washington crew was composed of kids from working- and middle-class families. Rowing, then as now, was considered an elite sport. The 1924 Yale crew that won the gold medal in Paris, for instance, featured both a Rockefeller and Benjamin Spock (yes, Dr. Spock). But the Husky rowers could barely afford lunch, much less a trip to Berlin. Several paid their college tuition and living expenses from money earned through the National Youth Administration, a New Deal organization. "We used to sweep out the pavilion that was used for basketball and other events, we did the football field, we sold tickets, we ushered," McMillin remembered. His teammate Gordon Adam worked as a janitor’s assistant, washing windows and scrubbing floors for $15 a month.

Despite third-class accommodations, the crew enjoyed themselves on the passage to Europe. But Don Hume and John White caught colds on the boat, and others felt seasick. When the *Manhattan* arrived in Hamburg, the team was relieved to be back on land. But gray fog encased Berlin throughout the Olympics, with rain and an unseasonable cold spell chilling and dampening the massive Köpenick police barracks where the team was bunking. A particularly brutal qualifying race, in which the Huskies set the Olympic record while narrowly edging out a strong British eight, only exacerbated Hume's illness. He passed out at the finish line, only to revive when Moch splashed cold water on him. The victory, however, allowed the Huskies to rest while other boats fought through additional qualifying races.

On the morning of the final, Hume was in terrible shape. He shivered uncontrollably, and he appeared mentally and physically wan. With his eyes closed and his mouth slack, he barely pulled his oar during warm ups.

The race began in typical fashion for the Huskies. “We all know the Washington crew … is probably the slowest-starting crew in the world,” said CBS’ Bill Henry with a chuckle. “It gives everybody heart failure.” With the Americans “dragging along” in Henry’s words, the Italians and Germans were more than a boat length in front at the halfway mark of the 2000-meter race. McMillin, rowing in the middle of the eight, sensed something was amiss. "Somewhere about the middle of the race I knew we were
not doing well and we were behind,” he told me. “I thought, God, we've come all this way from Seattle, and to end up our season like this ... it can't happen."

![The German crew at the start line of the Olympic final. (Photo courtesy U.S. National Archives.)](Image)

As the shells whizzed past, cameramen perched atop buoys captured the race for Germany’s top filmmaker, Leni Riefenstahl. German dominance on the water ensured that rowing events would feature prominently in *Olympia*, her classic propaganda film on the games. But the day of the rowing final was a disaster for Riefenstahl, as Olympic authorities, who were concerned about lightning, forced her to ground the balloon she’d set up to track the race from above. (When gas from the descending balloon escaped too quickly, cameraman Walter Frentz fell into the Spree River. He was not injured.) Riefenstahl ultimately interspersed her limited actual race footage with pre-recorded, dramatized film and audio. Every in-boat, water-level shot in the clip below was filmed before the final race, with fanciful audio mixed in. (Bob Moch did not call out “Push! Pull!” on every stroke.)

As the German crew powered toward the finish line, the crowd chanted “Deutsch-land! Deutsch-land!” in time with each stroke. The noise swelled, and the rowers sensed the finish line closing in. The Americans had to make their move. Moch, the coxswain, stared at Hume's face. With about 800 meters remaining his eyes opened and he began rowing with authority. Responding to Hume's emerging strength, the boat's stroke rating rose.

High above the grandstand at the finish line, CBS' Bill Henry watched the final sprint unfold:
It looks as though the United States [is] beginning to pour it on now! The Washington crew is driving hard on the outside of the course, they are coming very close now to getting into the lead! They have about 500 meters to go, perhaps a little less than 500 meters, and there is no question in the world that Washington has made up a tremendous amount of distance. … They have moved up definitely into third place. Italy is still leading, Germany is second, and Washington – the United States – has come up very rapidly on the outside. They are crowding up to the finish now with less than a quarter of a mile to go!

The resolve built from countless hours of practice kicked in. Within 300 meters, the Huskies pulled even with the tiring Germans and Italians. A supposed transcript of the German radio call, as published in a post-Olympic program, captures the excitement: “Still Italy! Then Germany! Now England! Ah, the Americans – their powerful spurts are irresistible! Their oars rip massively through the water!”

The crowd’s roar became deafening as the three boats matched each other stroke for stroke. As they crossed the line together, the rowers couldn’t tell who had won. The men in all three boats recoiled or collapsed in exhaustion as the crowd quieted down to await the results. “Nobody said a word,” Moch remembered.

![The American crew (top) crosses the finish line first.](Photo courtesy University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, UIW1705.)
After an interminable wait, the announcement came over the loudspeaker: USA 6:25.4, Italy 6:26.0, Germany 6:26.4. After almost six-and-a-half minutes of racing, just one second separated the three boats.

It would be the most physically demanding race any of them would ever row. "God, we were out of gas at the end," McMillin remembered. "How I struggled through that last 20 [strokes] I don't know."

After regrouping, the Americans paddled their boat to the dock in front of the grandstand to receive the victors' laurel wreaths. In a separate ceremony in Berlin's Olympic stadium, Roger Morris, Charles Day, Gordon Adam, John White, James McMillin, George Hunt, Joe Rantz, Don Hume, and Robert Moch received their gold medals.* McMillin told me it was the most emotional moment of his life.

Hitler’s reaction to the U.S. victory was neither recorded by the assembled press nor described over the radio. “I didn’t give a damn about Hitler,” Bob Moch told me. “We didn’t care whether he existed or not. We were there to do a job.” The German radio broadcast reveled in the overall quality of the race, with the announcer boasting that Deutschland’s “bronze medal has a golden glow.” As the “Star-Spangled Banner” played, the crowd gave the Nazi salute to the American victors.

In the days after their victory, the American press swooned over the crew, with major articles appearing in all the dailies. The gold-medal performance still resonated the following spring, with Collier's and the Saturday Evening Post paying Ulbrickson to describe the race. Seventy-five years later, though, the feats of the Washington crew have largely been forgotten. The first of the Huskies to cross the finish line, bowman Roger Morris, was the last to die. He passed away in 2009, and with him went the last participant memories of one of the greatest U.S. Olympic teams. Yet their legacy lives on in those still rowing on Seattle’s Montlake Cut. This June, Washington’s varsity men’s crew set a new course record in winning the Intercollegiate Rowing Association Championship. The men of the Husky Clipper would have been proud.

7A. Video Link: Men’s Rowing from Riefenstahl’s Olympia (1938)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=quQopJmQry4

NOTE: The first race shown is the 4-man. The race that concerns us, the 8-man, is shown second.

7B. Video Link: The Official Book Trailer for The Boys in the Boat

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n58w0BctOvs
PART II: THEMATIC CONNECTIONS:
Grit and Success

8. Professor Angela Duckworth’s TED Talk on Grit and the Power of Passion and Perseverance

https://www.ted.com/talks/angela_lee_duckworth_grit_the_power_of_passion_and_perseverance#t-3338

9. “Grit: Perseverance and Passion for Long-Term Goals” by Angela L. Duckworth, Department of Psychology, University of Pennsylvania
Source: https://d3jc3ahdjad7x7.cloudfront.net/cJrG7IXcgpKYYu1qzxxMy1ibFlsiUocPz2b6j2DZJ2Z6ld.pdf

“Compared with what we ought to be, we are only half awake. Our fires are damped, our drafts are checked...men the world over possess amounts of resource, which only exceptional individuals push to their extremes of use.”

–William James (1907), The Energies of Men, pp. 322-323

In 1907, psychologist and philosopher William James suggested that talents were different from the strengths of character required to fully exploit those talents. For his entire distinguished career, James was fascinated with why only a handful of individuals realize the limits of their potential while the rest of us fall far short of what we could be.

As a psychologist at the University of Pennsylvania, I have taken up James’s question of why some individuals accomplish more than others of equal talent. My research suggests that one personal quality is shared by the most prominent lead in every field: grit.

What is grit?

Grit is perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Grit entails working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining both effort and interest over years and years—despite failure, adversity, and even just stalls in progress. The gritty individual approaches
achievement as a marathon; his advantage is stamina. Whereas disappointment or boredom signals to others that it is time to change trajectory and cut losses, the gritty individual stays the course.

The idea that grit might be essential to high achievement evolved during interviews with professionals in a variety of fields unrelated to sports, including investment banking, painting, journalism, academia, medicine, and law. Asked what quality distinguishes star performers in their respective fields, these individuals cited grit or a close synonym as often as they mentioned raw talent. In fact, many were awed by the achievements of peers who did not at first seem as gifted as others but whose sustained commitment to their ambitions was exceptional. Likewise, many noted with surprise that prodigiously gifted peers did not end up at the top of their field.

Encouraged by these interviews, my colleagues and I developed a self-report questionnaire to measure grit. A version of this questionnaire is available at www.gritstudy.com, and includes questions about how consistent an individual’s interests tend to be over the long-term, and how the person reacts to disappointment and failure. (The questionnaire can be faked in the sense that a person can easily “pretend” to be grittier than he or she really is, but in the context of academic research, there is no serious incentive to do so.)

**Research Findings:**
Here is a summary of our findings. In our first study, we found that grittier adults complete more years of education. Completing an advanced degree is a challenge for many individuals – the dropout rate from community colleges, for example, is by some estimates far higher than 50%. Grittier individuals also make fewer career changes over the course of their lifetime. One unexpected finding was that older individuals tend to be higher in grit than younger individuals. It is possible that we get grittier as grow older and mature – this is true of several personality traits such as conscientiousness.

In a second study, grittier college undergraduates earned higher GPAs than their peers, despite having slightly lower SAT scores. More generally, we find in all of our research that grit is either inversely related to measures of talent or not related at all. In other words, we do not find that the most able individuals are always the ones who stick with their commitments over the long haul. This implies that talent and grit are not tightly yoked—it is quite possible to be talented and not gritty enough to succeed, just as it is possible to be gritty but not adequately gifted. Probably it takes very high levels of talent and grit, and since these qualities are independent of each other, we should expect only a few individuals to have the highest level of both.

School is challenging in some respects, but these initial findings encouraged us to seek more demanding contexts for testing the importance of grit. At West Point, we found grit to be a better predictor of which cadets make it through the first summer of training.
(aka Beast Barracks) than a summary measure of cadet quality used by the West Point admissions committee. At the Scripps National Spelling Bee, grittier competitors outranked less gritty competitors, at least in part because they studied longer and for more years than did their same-aged counterparts. Finally, in a study of novice school teachers, grittier teachers raised their students’ standardized test scores more dramatically than did their less gritty counterparts.

**Implications for Elite Performance**

In my view, achievement is the product of talent and effort. This may seem obvious, but what may not be so clear is that effort is not just not intensity, but also consistency and duration. It’s fairly easy to observe that some individuals work harder than others at a moment in time. As an example, consider two children learning to swim. Assume that both children are equally talented in sports and, therefore, improve in skill at the same rate per unit effort. Assume further that these children are matched in the intensity of effort they expend towards their training. Duration and direction of effort, on the other hand, are described by the number of accumulated hours devoted to training and, crucially, the decision to deepen expertise in swimming rather than to explore alternative pursuits. Our findings suggest that children matched on talent and capacity for hard work may nevertheless differ in grit. Thus, a prodigy who practices intensively yet moves from swimming to the track to yet another sport will likely be surpassed by an equally gifted but grittier child.

How does grit relate to other psychological variables known to predict achievement, such as self-efficacy, optimism, and intrinsic motivation? One possibility is that the propensity to pursue long-term goals with perseverance and passion may be determined in part by these other traits. More research is needed to tease out these relationships. In a study of the childhoods and training of world-class pianists, neurologists, swimmers, chess players, mathematicians, and sculptors, Ben Bloom noted that “only a few of [the 120 talented individuals in the sample] were regarded as prodigies by teachers, parents, or experts.” (p. 533). Rather, accomplished individuals worked day after day, for at least ten or fifteen years, to reach the top of their fields. Later, work by Florida State University professor Anders Ericsson confirmed that indeed at least ten or twenty years of deliberate practice could not be circumvented for those who aim to be the best at what they do.

My conclusion is that in every field, grit may be as essential as talent to high accomplishment. If substantiated, this conclusion has at least two implications: First, young athletes who demonstrate *exceptional commitment* to their goals should be supported with as many resources as those identified as gifted with prodigious ability. Second, we should encourage athletes not only to work with intensity, but also
with stamina. In particular, we should prepare our young people to anticipate failures, misfortunes, and even occasional boredom. We might point out that excellence in any discipline requires years and years of time on task. There is simply no substitute.

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The downsides of dogged, single-minded persistence

“WHERE DOES THE power come from to see the race to its end?” asks the Scottish sprinter Eric Liddell in a scene from Chariots of Fire. His answer — “from within” — was until recently about as far as we’d come in understanding the roots of dogged persistence.

Besides the famous “marshmallow test,” in which preschoolers who abstain from eating one get rewarded with two, measures of motivation have remained mushy. For most of its existence, even the United States Military Academy at West Point, where the celebration of unflagging commitment is etched into the campus statuary, lacked a reliable determinant of which cadets would have the drive to endure their first seven weeks (colloquially known as “Beast Barracks”) and which would say no más and go home. SAT scores, it turned out, were no predictor, nor were ACT scores, high-school rank, physical fitness, “leadership potential,” or any other measure of aptitude. At one point, military psychologists even showed cadets flash cards of random images in hopes of unearthing some subconscious basis for staying power. That, too, failed.

What finally did work was appallingly simple. In 2004, on their second day at West Point, 1,218 new cadets sat down with a sheet of 12 statements — “I finish whatever I begin,” “setbacks don’t discourage me,” and “new ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones” among them — that they rated on a scale from “not at all like me” to “very much like me.” Drawn up by Angela Duckworth, then a doctoral student and now a psychology professor at the University of Pennsylvania, the test was a cinch compared with those to come. But it successfully predicted who would be there at the end of the seven weeks. The 71 cadets who called it quits tested as well as their peers on everything but Duckworth’s “Grit Scale.”

If you have recently bumped into that word, grit, Duckworth is the reason. She has argued that grit can be developed — and is at least as important as IQ in predicting
educational success. In education and parenting circles, her research has provided a much needed antipode to hovering, by which children are systematically deprived of the opportunity to experience setbacks, much less overcome them.

But what does Duckworth’s research suggest for grown-ups, in a professional context? Quite a lot, Duckworth would say. In her forthcoming first book, straightforwardly titled *Grit*, Duckworth pushes into the world of careers. She argues that grit—perseverance plus the exclusive pursuit of a single passion—is a severely underrated component of career success, and that grown-ups, too, need a better understanding of the nature and prevalence of setbacks.

Grit may be essential. But it is not attractive.

The ascent of Duckworth’s buzzword owes a lot to her prior doubts about her own grittiness. Clearly, she had talent—a characteristic that Duckworth defines as “how quickly your skills improve when you invest effort.” It’s what enabled her, in her 20s, to hopscotch from one station in the meritocracy to another: Marshall Scholar at Oxford (where she picked up a neuroscience degree), speechwriting intern at the White House, management consultant at McKinsey, and finally science teacher at a charter school. But at age 32, she told me recently, stricken by the thought that she was a dilettante—a promising beginner who always would be one—she enrolled in the doctoral program at Penn, and made a vow not to look sideways for 10 years. Then she set about solving a puzzle that had vexed her during her teaching days: how to get kids to persevere just a little longer in tackling problems that exceeded their current skill set.

Initially, Duckworth guessed that the answer had to do with short-term impulse control. The preschoolers who had held out for that extra marshmallow, after all, ended up as higher academic achievers than the kids who ate the first one. But impulse control did not fully account for how long people persisted at something in the absence of positive feedback such as success. So Duckworth simply began interviewing accomplished people in various fields—sales, publishing, entertainment—and parsing their descriptions of how top performers operated.

What distinguished high performers, she found, was largely how they processed feelings of frustration, disappointment, or even boredom. Whereas others took these as signals to cut their losses and turn to some easier task, high performers did not—as if they had been conditioned to believe that struggle was not a signal for alarm.

To Duckworth, here was an opening. If you could change people’s beliefs about how success happens, then you had a crack at changing their behavior—delaying their quitting point a crucial modicum or two.
But beliefs are themselves gritty and persistent. Duckworth cites surveys supporting this point. Ask Americans which they think is more important to success, effort or talent, and they pick effort two to one. Ask them which quality they’d desire most in a new employee, and they pick industriousness over intelligence five to one. But deep down, they hold the opposite view.

We know this thanks to another researcher, whose work Duckworth draws on, Chia-Jung Tsay of University College London. Tsay asked professional musicians to listen to audio clips of two pianists, one described as a “natural,” the other as a “striver.” Despite the fact that the two pianists were really one pianist playing different sections of the same composition—and in flat contradiction to the listeners’ stated belief that effort trumped talent—the musicians thought the “natural” sounded more likely to succeed than the “striver,” and more hirable. Tsay found a similar prejudice among people considering an investment proposal. Their preference for backing a “natural” entrepreneur over a “striver” entrepreneur was erased only when the latter was given four more years of experience and $40,000 more in capital.

Whence the bias for naturals? Duckworth offered me her best guess: We don’t like strivers because they invite self-comparisons. If what separates, say, Roger Federer from you and me is nothing but the number of hours spent at “deliberate practice”—as the most-extreme behaviorists argue—our enjoyment of the U.S. Open could be interrupted by the thought There but for the grace of grit go I.

Whatever its origins, the bias has practical implications. Certainly, it suggests that my deep terror of letting anyone see my half-written article drafts is not irrational but adaptive. It perpetuates a myth that I’m a natural—the words just flow out, folks, as fast as I can type!—and hides the far more mundane truth: that the words come out fitfully and woodenly, gradually succumbing to a state of readability only after many seemingly fruitless sessions. “If people knew how hard I had to work to gain my mastery, it would not seem so wonderful at all,” Michelangelo observed. Nietzsche concurred: “Wherever one can see the act of becoming one grows somewhat cool.”

Which suggests that Duckworth’s basic admonition, “Embrace challenge,” needs a qualifier: Do it in private. Grit may be essential. But it is not attractive.

This can make for confusing career advice. “Try hard enough and you can do just about anything, as long as you don’t seem to be trying very hard” is not the stuff of school murals. Yet the combination of private toil and public ease, Duckworth agreed, may well be the beau idéal between countervailing imperatives.

Still, the prevalence of hidden practice among successful people is costly to society because it obscures the amount of failure that goes into success. Go on YouTube,
Duckworth suggests in her book, and try to find footage of “effortful, mistake-ridden, repetitive deliberate practice.” I did, and took her point. You cannot watch Yo-Yo Ma tediously repeating a difficult passage, or Ronald Reagan practicing his speeches in front of a mirror, or Steve Jobs unveiling a half-baked iPhone. (The closest I came was the discovery of an early Rolling Stones draft of “Start Me Up.” Suffice it to say: The song does not work as a reggae tune.) You see only the final products. If we routinely fool others, they routinely fool us. So when we experience messy frustration, we too readily believe that we don’t have the right stuff and give up.

As a direct countermeasure, Duckworth told me, she started changing her interactions with the dozen young researchers who work in her lab. They needed to see the rejection letters she received from peer-reviewed publications, she decided, and so she started circulating each one as it came in: pages upon pages of sometimes savage attacks of the sort professors regularly deal one another, anonymously, by way of saying an article is unfit for publication. This is not something she would have done, Duckworth quickly noted, at a less secure moment in her career. But getting a MacArthur genius grant (as Duckworth did, in 2013) allows you to, among other things, hold your failure up to others and say, in effect, this is what success looks like.

Duckworth’s book is at its best when it, too, is showing the mess behind success. What she proves, scientifically, is limited. Of the various groupings where she finds the Grit Scale to predict staying power—Green Beret candidates, National Spelling Bee contestants, Chicago public-school students—only a couple (Teach for America participants and salespeople at a vacation-time-share company) involve a workforce. But what sticks with you are the testimonials, collected from sources as disparate as Will Smith, William James, and Jeff Bezos’s mom, that relentlessly deflate the myth of the natural.

If I was left with one nagging question after reading Duckworth’s book, it had to do with the second part of her grit recipe. Just half of the Grit Scale’s questions are designed to measure perseverance, or the determination to meet a particular challenge. The other half measure what she calls passion but might be better understood as directional consistency, or the ability to stick unswervingly to a single, superordinate goal over a period of years. Duckworth mentions a journalist who chose his path precisely because “the journalism industry was very hierarchical, and it was clear how to get from A to B to C to D.” But that describes journalism maybe 15 years ago. Which made me wonder: How well does this approach—basically, pick one long-range goal, keep your head down, and don’t take a step sideways—hold up in an economy where career paths can twist and even vanish with little warning? Shouldn’t you keep your head up, ready for the next pivot? Or have many irons in the fire, as the champions of “career agility” suggest?
Duckworth gamely admitted to me that she had not thought of this—a result, perhaps, of her roots in education (where the paths to success have clear signposts) and her position in academia, one of the last truly guild-like domains. “Grit may carry risk,” she thought out loud, “because it’s about putting all your eggs in one basket, to some extent.”

Even if Grit’s career advice is partly outmoded—or applicable only to fields where the rules of advancement remain stable—it may be useful, anyway, to the extent that we need some direction to get anywhere. And if we are forced to switch paths? Well, that requires grit too. I thought of Intel’s Andy Grove, a chemical engineer who, at age 32, suddenly found himself in charge of a chip-fabrication plant full of people he was supposed to manage. A more complacent person might have lunged for the comfort of his existing skill set. But Grove opened a school notebook and posed himself the question What is a manager?

He pasted in news clippings (Time’s description of a movie director’s role, for instance), annotated these with more questions (“My job description?”), and began to bear down on his fuzzy new understandings by sketching them as graphs. It’s the record of a man repeatedly hurling himself against an unfamiliar challenge. In the end, the notebook was full.

11. Outliers, by Malcolm Gladwell
from Chapter Two: The 10,000-Hour Rule
Source:

2. For almost a generation, psychologists around the world have been engaged in a spirited debate over a question that most of us would consider to have been settled years ago. The question is this: is there such a thing as innate talent? The obvious answer is yes. Not every hockey player born in January ends up playing at the professional level. Only some do—the innately talented ones. Achievement is talent plus preparation. The problem with this view is that the closer psychologists look at the careers of the gifted, the smaller the role innate talent seems to play and the bigger the role preparation seems to play.

Exhibit A in the talent argument is a study done in the early 1990s by the psychologist K. Anders Ericsson and two colleagues at Berlin’s elite Academy of Music. With the help of the Academy’s professors, they divided the school's violinists into three groups. In the first group were the stars, the students with the potential to become world-class soloists. In the second were those judged to be merely "good." In the third were
students who were unlikely to ever play professionally and who intended to be music teachers in the public school system. All of the violinists were then asked the same question: over the course of your entire career, ever since you first picked up the violin, how many hours have you practiced?

Everyone from all three groups started playing at roughly the same age, around five years old. In those first few years, everyone practiced roughly the same amount, about two or three hours a week. But when the students were around the age of eight, real differences started to emerge. The students who would end up the best in their class began to practice more than everyone else: six hours a week by age nine, eight hours a week by age twelve, sixteen hours a week by age fourteen, and up and up, until by the age of twenty they were practicing—that is, purposefully and single-mindedly playing their instruments with the intent to get better—well over thirty hours a week. In fact, by the age of twenty, the elite performers had each totaled ten thousand hours of practice. By contrast, the merely good students had totaled eight thousand hours, and the future music teachers had totaled just over four thousand hours.

Ericsson and his colleagues then compared amateur pianists with professional pianists. The same pattern emerged. The amateurs never practiced more than about three hours a week over the course of their childhood, and by the age of twenty they had totaled two thousand hours of practice. The professionals, on the other hand, steadily increased their practice time every year, until by the age of twenty they, like the violinists, had reached ten thousand hours.

The striking thing about Ericsson's study is that he and his colleagues couldn't find any "naturals," musicians who floated effortlessly to the top while practicing a fraction of the time their peers did. Nor could they find any "grinds," people who worked harder than everyone else, yet just didn't have what it takes to break the top ranks. Their research suggests that once a musician has enough ability to get into a top music school, the thing that distinguishes one performer from another is how hard he or she works. That's it. And what's more, the people at the very top don't work just harder or even much harder than everyone else. They work much, much harder.

The idea that excellence at performing a complex task requires a critical minimum level of practice surfaces again and again in studies of expertise. In fact, researchers have settled on what they believe is the magic number for true expertise: ten thousand hours.

"The emerging picture from such studies is that ten thousand hours of practice is required to achieve the level of mastery associated with being a world-class expert—in anything," writes the neurologist Daniel Levitin. "In study after study, of composers, basketball players, fiction writers, ice skaters, concert pianists, chess players, master
criminals, and what have you, this number comes up again and again. Of course, this doesn't address why some people get more out of their practice sessions than others do. But no one has yet found a case in which true world class expertise was accomplished in less time. It seems that it takes the brain this long to assimilate all that it needs to know to achieve true mastery."

This is true even of people we think of as prodigies. Mozart, for example, famously started writing music at six. But, writes the psychologist Michael Howe in his book *Genius Explained*,

by the standards of mature composers, Mozart's early works are not outstanding. The earliest pieces were all probably written down by his father, and perhaps improved in the process. Many of Wolfgang’s childhood compositions, such as the first seven of his concertos for piano and orchestra, are largely arrangements of works by other composers. Of those concertos that only contain music original to Mozart, the earliest that is now regarded as a masterwork (No. 9, K. 271) was not composed until he was twenty-one: by that time Mozart had already been composing concertos for ten years.

The music critic Harold Schonberg goes further: Mozart, he argues, actually "developed late," since he didn't produce his greatest work until he had been composing for more than twenty years.

To become a chess grandmaster also seems to take about ten years. (Only the legendary Bobby Fischer got to that elite level in less than that amount of time: it took him nine years.) And what's ten years? Well, it's roughly how long it takes to put in ten thousand hours of hard practice. Ten thousand hours is the magic number of greatness.

Here is the explanation for what was so puzzling about the rosters of the Czech and Canadian national sports teams [*from Chapter 1*]. There was practically no one on those teams born after September 1, which doesn't seem to make any sense. You'd think that there should be a fair number of Czech hockey or soccer prodigies born late in the year who are so talented that they eventually make their way into the top tier as young adults, despite their birth dates.

But to Ericsson and those who argue against the primacy of talent, that isn't surprising at all. That late-born prodigy doesn't get chosen for the all-star team as an eight-year-old because he's too small. So he doesn't get the extra practice. And without that extra practice, he has no chance at hitting ten thousand hours by the time
the professional hockey teams start looking for players. And without ten thousand hours under his belt, there is no way he can ever master the skills necessary to play at the top level. Even Mozart—the greatest musical prodigy of all time—couldn't hit his stride until he had his ten thousand hours in. Practice isn't the thing you do once you're good. It's the thing you do that makes you good.

The other interesting thing about that ten thousand hours, of course, is that ten thousand hours is an enormous amount of time. It's all but impossible to reach that number all by yourself by the time you're a young adult. You have to have parents who encourage and support you. You can't be poor, because if you have to hold down a part-time job on the side to help make ends meet, there won't be time left in the day to practice enough. In fact, most people can reach that number only if they get into some kind of special program—like a hockey all-star squad—or if they get some kind of extraordinary opportunity that gives them a chance to put in those hours.

4. Is the ten-thousand-hour rule a general rule of success? Let's test the idea with two examples, and for the sake of simplicity, let's make them as familiar as possible: the Beatles, one of the most famous rock bands ever; and Bill Gates, one of the world's richest men.

The Beatles—John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, and Ringo Starr—came to the United States in February of 1964, starting the so-called British Invasion of the American music scene and putting out a string of hit records that transformed the face of popular music. The first interesting thing about the Beatles for our purposes is how long they had already been together by the time they reached the United States. Lennon and McCartney first started playing together in 1957, seven years prior to landing in America. (Incidentally, the time that elapsed between their founding and their arguably greatest artistic achievements—Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band and The Beatles [White Album]—is ten years.) And if you look even more closely at those long years of preparation, you'll find an experience that, in the context of hockey players and Bill Joy and world-class violinists, sounds awfully familiar. In 1960, while they were still just a struggling high school rock band, they were invited to play in Hamburg, Germany.

"Hamburg in those days did not have rock-and-roll music clubs. It had strip clubs," says Philip Norman, who wrote the Beatles biography Shout! "There was one particular club owner called Bruno, who was originally a fairground showman. He had the idea of bringing in rock groups to play in various clubs. They had this formula. It was a huge nonstop show, hour after hour, with a lot of people lurching in and the other lot lurching out. And the bands would play all the time to catch the passing traffic. In an American red light district, they would call it nonstop striptease."
"Many of the bands that played in Hamburg were from Liverpool," Norman went on. "It was an accident. Bruno went to London to look for bands. But he happened to meet an entrepreneur from Liverpool in SoHo who was down in London by pure chance. And he arranged to send some bands over. That's how the connection was established. And eventually the Beatles made a connection not just with Bruno but with other club owners as well. They kept going back because they got a lot of alcohol and a lot of sex." And what was so special about Hamburg? It wasn't that it paid well. It didn't. Or that the acoustics were fantastic. They weren't. Or that the audiences were savvy and appreciative. They were anything but. It was the sheer amount of time the band was forced to play.

Here is John Lennon, in an interview after the Beatles disbanded, talking about the band's performances at a Hamburg strip club called the Indra:

We got better and got more confidence. We couldn't help it with all the experience playing all night long. It was handy them being foreign. We had to try even harder, put our heart and soul into it, to get ourselves over. In Liverpool, we'd only ever done one-hour sessions, and we just used to do our best numbers, the same ones, at every one. In Hamburg, we had to play for eight hours, so we really had to find a new way of playing.

Eight hours?

Here is Pete Best, the Beatles' drummer at the time: "Once the news got out about that we were making a show, the club started packing them in. We played seven nights a week. At first we played almost nonstop till twelve-thirty, when it closed, but as we got better the crowds stayed till two most mornings."

Seven days a week?

The Beatles ended up traveling to Hamburg five times between 1960 and the end of 1962. On the first trip, they played 106 nights, five or more hours a night. On their second trip, they played 92 times. On their third trip, they played 48 times, for a total of 172 hours on stage. The last two Hamburg gigs, in November and December of 1962, involved another 90 hours of performing. All told, they performed for 270 nights in just over a year and a half. By the time they had their first burst of success in 1964, in fact, they had performed live an estimated twelve hundred times. Do you know how extraordinary that is? Most bands today don't perform twelve hundred times in their entire careers. The Hamburg crucible is one of the things that set the Beatles apart.
"They were no good onstage when they went there and they were very good when they came back," Norman went on. "They learned not only stamina. They had to learn an enormous amount of numbers—cover versions of everything you can think of, not just rock and roll, a bit of jazz too. They weren't disciplined onstage at all before that. But when they came back, they sounded like no one else. It was the making of them."

5.
Let's now turn to the history of Bill Gates. His story is almost as well known as the Beatles'. Brilliant, young math whiz discovers computer programming. Drops out of Harvard. Starts a little computer company called Microsoft with his friends. Through sheer brilliance and ambition and guts builds it into the giant of the software world.

That's the broad outline. Let's dig a little bit deeper.

Gates's father was a wealthy lawyer in Seattle, and his mother was the daughter of a well-to-do banker. As a child Bill was precocious and easily bored by his studies. So his parents took him out of public school and, at the beginning of seventh grade, sent him to Lakeside, a private school that catered to Seattle's elite families. Midway through Gates's second year at Lakeside, the school started a computer club.
"The Mothers' Club at school did a rummage sale every year, and there was always the question of what the money would go to," Gates remembers. "Some went to the summer program, where inner-city kids would come up to the campus. Some of it would go for teachers. That year, they put three thousand dollars into a computer terminal down in this funny little room that we subsequently took control of. It was kind of an amazing thing."

It was an "amazing thing," of course, because this was 1968. Most colleges didn't have computer clubs in the 1960s. Even more remarkable was the kind of computer Lakeside bought. The school didn't have its students learn programming by the laborious computer-card system, like virtually everyone else was doing in the 1960s. Instead, Lakeside installed what was called an ASR-33 Teletype, which was a time-sharing terminal with a direct link to a mainframe computer in downtown Seattle. "The whole idea of time-sharing only got invented in nineteen sixty-five," Gates continued. "Someone was pretty forward-looking." Bill Joy got an extraordinary, early opportunity to learn programming on a time-share system as a freshman in college, in 1971. Bill Gates got to do real-time programming as an eighth grader in 1968.

From that moment forward, Gates lived in the computer room. He and a number of others began to teach themselves how to use this strange new device. Buying time on the mainframe computer the ASR was hooked up to was, of course, expensive—even for a wealthy institution like Lakeside—and it wasn't long before the $3,000 put up by the Mothers' Club ran out. The parents raised more money. The students spent it. Then
a group of programmers at the University of Washington formed an outfit called Computer Center Corporation (or C-Cubed), which leased computer time to local companies. As luck would have it, one of the founders of the firm—Monique Rona—had a son at Lakeside, a year ahead of Gates. Would the Lakeside computer club, Rona wondered, like to test out the company's software programs on the weekends in exchange for free programming time? Absolutely!

After school, Gates took the bus to the C-Cubed offices and programmed long into the evening. C-Cubed eventually went bankrupt, so Gates and his friends began hanging around the computer center at the University of Washington. Before long, they latched onto an outfit called ISI (Information Sciences Inc.), which agreed to let them have free computer time in exchange for working on a piece of software that could be used to automate company payrolls. In one seven-month period in 1971, Gates and his cohorts ran up 1,575 hours of computer time on the ISI mainframe, which averages out to eight hours a day, seven days a week.

"It was my obsession," Gates says of his early high school years. "I skipped athletics. I went up there at night. We were programming on weekends. It would be a rare week that we wouldn't get twenty or thirty hours in. There was a period where Paul Allen and I got in trouble for stealing a bunch of passwords and crashing the system. We got kicked out. I didn't get to use the computer the whole summer. This is when I was fifteen and sixteen. Then I found out Paul had found a computer that was free at the University of Washington. They had these machines in the medical center and the physics department. They were on a twenty-four-hour schedule, but with this big slack period, so that between three and six in the morning they never scheduled anything." Gates laughed. "I'd leave at night, after my bedtime. I could walk up to the University of Washington from my house. Or I'd take the bus. That's why I'm always so generous to the University of Washington, because they let me steal so much computer time." (Years later, Gates's mother said, "We always wondered why it was so hard for him to get up in the morning.")

One of the founders of ISI, Bud Pembroke, then got a call from the technology company TRW, which had just signed a contract to set up a computer system at the huge Bonneville Power station in southern Washington State. TRW desperately needed programmers familiar with the particular software the power station used. In these early days of the computer revolution, programmers with that kind of specialized experience were hard to find. But Pembroke knew exactly whom to call: those high school kids from Lakeside who had been running up thousands of hours of computer time on the ISI mainframe. Gates was now in his senior year, and somehow he managed to convince his teachers to let him decamp for Bonneville under the guise of an independent study project. There he spent the spring writing code, supervised by a man named John Norton, who Gates says taught him as much about programming as almost
anyone he'd ever met. Those five years, from eighth grade through the end of high school, were Bill Gates's Hamburg, and by any measure, he was presented with an even more extraordinary series of opportunities than Bill Joy.

Opportunity number one was that Gates got sent to Lakeside. How many high schools in the world had access to a time-sharing terminal in 1968? Opportunity number two was that the mothers of Lakeside had enough money to pay for the school's computer fees. Number three was that, when that money ran out, one of the parents happened to work at C-Cubed, which happened to need someone to check its code on the weekends, and which also happened not to care if weekends turned into weeknights. Number four was that Gates just happened to find out about ISI, and ISI just happened to need someone to work on its payroll software. Number five was that Gates happened to live within walking distance of the University of Washington. Number six was that the university happened to have free computer time between three and six in the morning. Number seven was that TRW happened to call Bud Pembroke. Number eight was that the best programmers Pembroke knew for that particular problem happened to be two high school kids. And number nine was that Lakeside was willing to let those kids spend their spring term miles away, writing code.

And what did virtually all of those opportunities have in common? They gave Bill Gates extra time to practice. By the time Gates dropped out of Harvard after his sophomore year to try his hand at his own software company, he'd been programming practically nonstop for seven consecutive years. He was way past ten thousand hours. How many teenagers in the world had the kind of experience Gates had? "If there were fifty in the world, I'd be stunned," he says. "There was C-Cubed and the payroll stuff we did, then TRW—all those things came together. I had a better exposure to software development at a young age than I think anyone did in that period of time, and all because of an incredibly lucky series of events."

12. “Practice Does Not Make Perfect” by Hambrick, Ferreira, and Henderson from Slate (9/28/14)

Source:  
http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/science/2014/09/malcolm_gladwell_s_10_000_hour_rule_for_deliberate_practice_is_wrong_genes.html

We are not all created equal where our genes and abilities are concerned.  

A decade ago, Magnus Carlsen, who at the time was only 13 years old, created a sensation in the chess world when he defeated former world champion Anatoly Karpov at a chess tournament in Reykjavik, Iceland, and the next day played then-top-rated
Garry Kasparov—who is widely regarded as the best chess player of all time—to a draw. Carlsen’s subsequent rise to chess stardom was meteoric: grandmaster status later in 2004; a share of first place in the Norwegian Chess Championship in 2006; youngest player ever to reach World No. 1 in 2010; and highest-rated player in history in 2012.

What explains this sort of spectacular success? What makes someone rise to the top in music, games, sports, business, or science? This question is the subject of one of psychology’s oldest debates. In the late 1800s, Francis Galton—founder of the scientific study of intelligence and a cousin of Charles Darwin—analyzed the genealogical records of hundreds of scholars, artists, musicians, and other professionals and found that greatness tends to run in families. For example, he counted more than 20 eminent musicians in the Bach family. (Johann Sebastian was just the most famous.) Galton concluded that experts are “born.” Nearly half a century later, the behaviorist John Watson countered that experts are “made” when he famously guaranteed that he could take any infant at random and “train him to become any type of specialist [he] might select—doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief and, yes, even beggar-man and thief, regardless of his talents.”

One player needed 22 times more deliberate practice than another player to become a master.

The experts-are-made view has dominated the discussion in recent decades. In a pivotal 1993 article published in *Psychological Review*—psychology’s most prestigious journal—the Swedish psychologist K. Anders Ericsson and his colleagues proposed that performance differences across people in domains such as music and chess largely reflect differences in the amount of time people have spent engaging in “deliberate practice,” or training exercises specifically designed to improve performance. To test this idea, Ericsson and colleagues recruited violinists from an elite Berlin music academy and asked them to estimate the amount of time per week they had devoted to deliberate practice for each year of their musical careers. The major finding of the study was that the most accomplished musicians had accumulated the most hours of deliberate practice. For example, the average for elite violinists was about 10,000 hours, compared with only about 5,000 hours for the least accomplished group. In a second study, the difference for pianists was even greater—an average of more than 10,000 hours for experts compared with only about 2,000 hours for amateurs. Based on these findings, Ericsson and colleagues argued that prolonged effort, not innate talent, explained differences between experts and novices.

These findings filtered their way into pop culture. They were the inspiration for what Malcolm Gladwell termed the “10,000 Hour Rule” in his book *Outliers*, which in turn was the inspiration for the song “Ten Thousand Hours” by the hip-hop duo

Macklemore and Ryan Lewis, the opening track on their Grammy-award winning album The Heist. However, recent research has demonstrated that deliberate practice, while undeniably important, is only one piece of the expertise puzzle—and not necessarily the biggest piece. In the first study to convincingly make this point, the cognitive psychologists Fernand Gobet and Guillermo Campitelli found that chess players differed greatly in the amount of deliberate practice they needed to reach a given skill level in chess. For example, the number of hours of deliberate practice to first reach “master” status (a very high level of skill) ranged from 728 hours to 16,120 hours. This means that one player needed 22 times more deliberate practice than another player to become a master.

A recent meta-analysis by Case Western Reserve University psychologist Brooke Macnamara and her colleagues (including the first author of this article for Slate) came to the same conclusion. We searched through more than 9,000 potentially relevant publications and ultimately identified 88 studies that collected measures of activities interpretable as deliberate practice and reported their relationships to corresponding measures of skill. (Analyzing a set of studies can reveal an average correlation between two variables that is statistically more precise than the result of any individual study.) With very few exceptions, deliberate practice correlated positively with skill. In other words, people who reported practicing a lot tended to perform better than those who reported practicing less. But the correlations were far from perfect: Deliberate practice left more of the variation in skill unexplained than it explained. For example, deliberate practice explained 26 percent of the variation for games such as chess, 21 percent for music, and 18 percent for sports. So, deliberate practice did not explain all, nearly all, or even most of the performance variation in these fields. In concrete terms, what this evidence means is that racking up a lot of deliberate practice is no guarantee that you’ll become an expert. Other factors matter.

If one identical twin was good at drawing, it was quite likely that his or her identical sibling was, too.

What are these other factors? There are undoubtedly many. One may be the age at which a person starts an activity. In their study, Gobet and Campitelli found that chess players who started playing early reached higher levels of skill as adults than players who started later, even after taking into account the fact that the early starters had accumulated more deliberate practice than the later starters. There may be a critical window during childhood for acquiring certain complex skills, just as there seems to be for language.

There is now compelling evidence that genes matter for success, too. In a study led by the King’s College London psychologist Robert Plomin, more than 15,000 twins in the United Kingdom were identified through birth records and recruited to perform a
battery of tests and questionnaires, including a test of drawing ability in which the children were asked to sketch a person. In a recently published analysis of the data, researchers found that there was a stronger correspondence in drawing ability for the identical twins than for the fraternal twins. In other words, if one identical twin was good at drawing, it was quite likely that his or her identical sibling was, too. Because identical twins share 100 percent of their genes, whereas fraternal twins share only 50 percent on average, this finding indicates that differences across people in basic artistic ability are in part due to genes. In a separate study based on this U.K. sample, well over half of the variation between expert and less skilled readers was found to be due to genes.

In another study, a team of researchers at the Karolinska Institute in Sweden led by psychologist Miriam Mosing had more than 10,000 twins estimate the amount of time they had devoted to music practice and complete tests of basic music abilities, such as determining whether two melodies carry the same rhythm. The surprising discovery of this study was that although the music abilities were influenced by genes—to the tune of about 38 percent, on average—there was no evidence they were influenced by practice. For a pair of identical twins, the twin who practiced music more did not do better on the tests than the twin who practiced less. This finding does not imply that there is no point in practicing if you want to become a musician. The sort of abilities captured by the tests used in this study aren’t the only things necessary for playing music at a high level; things such as being able to read music, finger a keyboard, and commit music to memory also matter, and they require practice. But it does imply that there are limits on the transformative power of practice. As Mosing and her colleagues concluded, practice does not make perfect.

Along the same lines, biologist Michael Lombardo and psychologist Robert Deaner examined the biographies of male and female Olympic sprinters such as Jesse Owens, Marion Jones, and Usain Bolt, and found that, in all cases, they were exceptional compared with their competitors from the very start of their sprinting careers—before they had accumulated much more practice than their peers.

What all of this evidence indicates is that we are not created equal where our abilities are concerned. This conclusion might make you uncomfortable, and understandably so. Throughout history, so much wrong has been done in the name of false beliefs about genetic inequality between different groups of people—males vs. females, blacks vs. whites, and so on. War, slavery, and genocide are the most horrifying examples of the dangers of such beliefs, and there are countless others. In the United States, women were denied the right to vote until 1920 because too many people believed that women were constitutionally incapable of good judgment; in some countries, such as Saudi Arabia, they still are believed to be. Ever since John Locke laid the groundwork for the Enlightenment by proposing that we are born as tabula rasa—blank slates—the idea that
we are created equal has been the central tenet of the “modern” worldview. Enshrined as it is in the Declaration of Independence as a “self-evident truth,” this idea has special significance for Americans. Indeed, it is the cornerstone of the American dream—the belief that anyone can become anything they want with enough determination.

Pretending we have the same abilities perpetuates the myth that people can help themselves if they just try hard enough.

It is therefore crucial to differentiate between the influence of genes on differences in abilities across individuals and the influence of genes on differences across groups. The former has been established beyond any reasonable doubt by decades of research in a number of fields, including psychology, biology, and behavioral genetics. There is now an overwhelming scientific consensus that genes contribute to individual differences in abilities. The latter has never been established, and any claim to the contrary is simply false.

Another reason the idea of genetic inequality might make you uncomfortable is because it raises the specter of an anti-meritocratic society in which benefits such as good educations and high-paying jobs go to people who happen to be born with “good” genes. As the technology of genotyping progresses, it is not far-fetched to think that we will all one day have information about our genetic makeup, and that others—physicians, law enforcement, even employers or insurance companies—may have access to this information and use it to make decisions that profoundly affect our lives. However, this concern conflates scientific evidence with how that evidence might be used—which is to say that information about genetic diversity can just as easily be used for good as for ill.

Take the example of intelligence, as measured by IQ. We know from many decades of research in behavioral genetics that about half of the variation across people in IQ is due to genes. Among many other outcomes, IQ predicts success in school, and so once we have identified specific genes that account for individual differences in IQ, this information could be used to identify, at birth, children with the greatest genetic potential for academic success and channel them into the best schools. This would probably create a society even more unequal than the one we have. But this information could just as easily be used to identify children with the least genetic potential for academic success and channel them into the best schools. This would probably create a more equal society than the one we have, and it would do so by identifying those who are likely to face learning challenges and provide them with the support they might need. Science and policy are two different things, and when we dismiss the former because we assume it will influence the latter in a particular and pernicious way, we limit the good that can be done.
Wouldn’t it be better to just act as if we are equal, evidence to the contrary notwithstanding? That way, no people will be discouraged from chasing their dreams—competing in the Olympics or performing at Carnegie Hall or winning a Nobel Prize. The answer is no, for two reasons. The first is that failure is costly, both to society and to individuals. Pretending that all people are equal in their abilities will not change the fact that a person with an average IQ is unlikely to become a theoretical physicist, or the fact that a person with a low level of music ability is unlikely to become a concert pianist. It makes more sense to pay attention to people’s abilities and their likelihood of achieving certain goals, so people can make good decisions about the goals they want to spend their time, money, and energy pursuing. Moreover, genes influence not only our abilities, but the environments we create for ourselves and the activities we prefer—a phenomenon known as gene-environment correlation. For example, yet another recent twin study (and the Karolinska Institute study) found that there was a genetic influence on practicing music. Pushing someone into a career for which he or she is genetically unsuited will likely not work.

The second reason we should not pretend we are endowed with the same abilities is that doing so perpetuates the myth that is at the root of much inaction in society—the myth that people can help themselves to the same degree if they just try hard enough. You’re not a heart surgeon? That’s your fault for not working hard enough in school! You didn’t make it as a concert pianist? You must not have wanted it that badly.

Societal inequality is thus justified on the grounds that anyone who is willing to put in the requisite time and effort can succeed and should be rewarded with a good life, whereas those who struggle to make ends meet are to blame for their situations and should pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. If we acknowledge that people differ in what they have to contribute, then we have an argument for a society in which all human beings are entitled to a life that includes access to decent housing, health care, and education, simply because they are human. Our abilities might not be identical, and our needs surely differ, but our basic human rights are universal.


Source: http://www.ewa.org/blog-educated-reporter/teaching-grit-how-students-schools-can-benefit

Over at EWA Radio, we explored the debate over how so-called no cognitive factors like “grit” influence student achievement, and how schools are rethinking approaches to classroom instruction as a result. (You can find the full episode here.) I thought this was a good
opportunity to revisit a recent guest post by Daveen Rae Kurutz of the Beaver County Times, looking at our “deep dive” session into these issues at EWA’s recent National Seminar:

In a second-grade classroom outside of Palo Alto, Calif., students were sharing their answers to a math quiz. A young boy named Michael held up his answer, and, as was customary, his classmates showed their verdict on the answer – thumbs up or thumbs down.

For Michael, the verdict was thumbs down. While many children – and adults – might give up after that, Michael pushed on, said Carissa Romero, director of programs at Stanford University’s PERTS (the Project for Education Research That Scales).

He started going back and forth with his peers, asking why they disagreed with his answer. He stopped, and stared silently at the overhead projector screen displaying his work. His teacher praised him, telling him that his “brain is working so hard.”

Michael was finally able to explain the right answer to his peers, a fact that excited him and his classmates.

The process relayed by Romero reflects the mindset for learning set up in this classroom. But in education, the science of learning isn’t always a focus. At the Education Writers Association’s deep dive on the science of learning at the organization’s recent National Seminar, Romero and Camille Farrington, a senior research associate at the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research, explored the idea of academic mindsets and how they can be tied to student success.

Some people are naturally predisposed to be “gritty,” to have self-control and be willing to delay self-gratification until their work is done, said Camille Farrington. But for others, these skills need to be taught just like times tables. The payoff is at times huge: Several decades of peer-reviewed research shows adopting those mindsets can lead to significant academic boosts.

These “non-cognitive” abilities can be instilled directly or implicitly, though often teachers don’t realize the messages they’re signaling to their students. While subtle at first, the difference between rewarding a student for answering a question correctly and for demonstrating the will to plow through a problem is vast.

“Mindsets are habituated attitudes and beliefs,” Farrington told the EWA audience in Chicago. “We tend to, over time, come to see the world in a particular way. If teachers aren’t attending to the mindsets that kids are coming in with, they will continue to run on script.” Farrington says that part of the school experience involves developing academic mindsets – beliefs and attitudes about yourself as a student. Those mindsets
can affect how the child sees the world. Done correctly, students come away with the confidence to pursue tough material, even at the risk of failing initially.

That’s what was happening in Michael’s classroom, Romero said.

“It changes the meaning of the situation the student was in to an opportunity to grow and develop,” she said. “When school is about performance and getting as much as possible, a classroom can look like this, really embracing learning and struggle.”

But Michael’s class is likely in the minority – where learning from mistakes and collaborating to reach the right answer are encouraged. In many schools, a competitive streak prevails, mirroring the spate of rankings that pit schools against schools. There are studies that show that by kindergarten, students can line up their peers by how smart they are.

That’s not a model for success, Farrington said.

“As kids get older you have to replace an existing belief with a plausible story that will help you move forward,” Farrington said. “Schools are systems, and there’s quite a bit of pressures and accountabilities … when they have to spend so much time on math and reading,” so much so that concentrating instruction on something as seemingly touchy-feely as mindsets gets scant attention.

But the brain science on how students respond to growth mindset training is anything but squishy. In fact, teaching students that the brain is a muscle that’s capable of growing stronger through exercise and effort is an underlying theme of a software called Brainology, which was produced by scholars of growth mindset and helps teachers plan their curriculum by incorporating these non-cognitive strategies.

“The ‘some people are smart and some people aren’t’ mindset is pervasive throughout society,” Farrington said. “There’s a very different message in giving credit for what they accomplished – saying ‘you must have worked so hard for that.’ Parents are the first messenger of that.”

For her part, Farrington adopted a different mindset even at home with her children. Rather than offering blanket praise of “oh you’re so smart,” Farrington will encourage them to grow and give them credit for what they’ve accomplished.

There are definitely bad ways to get the idea across, Farrington said. For instance, teachers who put the mindsets on the wall and make students repeat them every day when they walk in aren’t drilling the idea into the child’s head.
Instead, they’re likely making the child feel worse about themselves when they might already feel like they don’t belong.

Giving the right type of positive reinforcement makes a difference, Romero said. “Telling a student ‘thinking harder makes you smarter’ is not the same as ‘try your best and don’t give up,’” Romero said. “Trying hard can feel not so great if you’re not in a great mindset.”

BY JEFFREY AARON SNYDER, FROM THE 5/6/14 issue of the New Republic


Imagine attending a high school where your teachers grade you on how well you handle disappointments and failures; respond to the feelings of your peers; and adapt to different social situations. Imagine, too, that the results are tabulated in a document called a “character growth card” and sent home to your parents along with your report card.

Sound far-fetched? Well, keeping tabs on a student’s character development is at the leading edge of the “new character education.” Paul Tough’s bestselling 2012 book, How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity and the Hidden Power of Character, is the closest thing the new character education has to a manifesto; and it has helped to convince thousands of school administrators, teachers, and parents that “performance character” qualities such as perseverance, discipline, and self-control trump IQ when it comes to determining academic success.

I was one of thousands of educators from all over the world who signed up for an online class taught by one of the leading figures in this movement: Dave Levin, the charismatic co-founder of the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) network of charter schools and the inventor of the character growth card. When the class went live, I had a few outstanding concerns, but I still expected the KIPP method would have a lot to offer. By
the end of the month-long course, my enthusiasm had waned, while my misgivings had multiplied. Here’s why.

Inspired by the field of positive psychology, character education at KIPP focuses on seven character strengths—grit, zest, self-control, optimism, gratitude, social intelligence, and curiosity. These seven strengths are presented as positive predictors of success in “college and life.” Grit, for example—a term Angela Duckworth used to mean “perseverance and passion for long-term goals”—has been shown to correlate with grade point averages and graduation rates. Levin envisions that character education will be woven into “the DNA” of KIPP’s classrooms and schools, especially via “dual purpose” instruction that is intended to explicitly teach both academic and character aims.

There are three major problems with the new character education. The first is that we do not know how to teach character. The second is that character-based education is untethered from any conception of morality. And lastly, this mode of education drastically constricts the overall purpose of education.

There may be an increasingly cogent “science of character,” as Levin says in the introductory video to his online class, but there is no science of teaching character. “Do we even know for sure that you can teach it?” Duckworth asks about grit in the same online video. Her answer: “No, we don’t.” We may discover that the most “desirable” character traits are largely inherited; stubbornly resistant to educational interventions; or both. We already know that grit is strongly correlated with “conscientiousness,” one of the Big Five personality traits that psychologists view as stable and hereditary. A recent report emphasizes that simply “knowing that non-cognitive factors matter is not the same as knowing how to develop them in students.” The report concludes that “clear, actionable strategies for classroom practice” are few and far between. Consider the fact that the world’s “grittiest” students, including Chinese students who log some of the longest hours on their homework, have never been exposed to a formal curriculum that teaches perseverance.

If “dual-purpose” instruction is one pillar of the KIPP approach to teaching character, the other is the character growth card. Originally called the character report card, it’s perhaps the most provocative element of character education at KIPP. Students rate themselves on character strengths, responding to prompts such as “kept working hard
even when s/he felt like quitting” for grit; “remembered and followed directions” for self-control; and “showed enthusiasm” for zest. All of a student’s teachers in turn rate the student, resulting in an “Average Teacher Score.” The overall goal is to use the card as a catalyst for “growth-oriented conversations” during parent-teacher conferences with the student present.

Levin claims that the character growth card is not meant to “evaluate, diagnose or compare” students. This assertion is either disingenuous or naïve. When Levin first hit on the idea of a character report card in 2007, he envisioned that students would eventually graduate with both a GPA and a CPA, or character point average. In Levin’s conception, the CPA would be a valuable tool for admissions officers and corporate human resources managers who would be delighted to know which applicants had scored highest on items such as grit, optimism, and zest. Even if Levin no longer believes the CPA is a wise idea, human beings have never devised an empirical performance measure that has not become fodder for making comparisons. Prepare to hear questions like “hey, what did you get on social intelligence?” in school hallways.

Levin claims that KIPP’s character education program is inspired by James Baldwin’s observation that “children have never been very good at listening to their elders but have never failed to imitate them.” It’s strange, then, that KIPP places such a strong emphasis on “labeling and talking about the character strengths” through conversations facilitated by adults. In footage from a seventh-grade math class featured in Levin’s online class, for instance, the teacher praises her students for working so hard, underscores the importance of “not giving up,” and then has the whole class say “grit” on the count of three.

“Words, words, words have become a cheap substitute for sound methods of character training,” education scholar Milo L. Whittaker sniffed in 1934, and it seems apt today. I have no doubt that many KIPPsters can rattle off the seven character strengths. The real question is whether learning to speak KIPP’s character language actually translates into substantive cognitive and behavioral changes. I am afraid that for most of the students, most of the time, the character lessons at KIPP will become indistinguishable from the kind of repetitive teacher-directed talk that only registers as so much background noise.
The second problem with the new character education is that it unwittingly promotes an amoral and careerist “looking out for number one” point-of-view. Never before has character education been so completely untethered from morals, values, and ethics. From the inception of our public school system in the 1840s and 1850s, character education has revolved around religious and civic virtues. Steeped in Protestantism and republicanism, the key virtues taught during the nineteenth-century were piety, industry, kindness, honesty, thrift, and patriotism. During the Progressive era, character education concentrated on the twin ideas of citizenship and the “common good.” As an influential 1918 report on “moral values” put it, character education “makes for a better America by helping its pupils to make themselves better persons.” In the 1960s and 1970s, meanwhile, character education focused on justice and working through thorny moral dilemmas.

Today’s grit and self-control are basically industry and temperance in the guise of psychological constructs rather than moral imperatives. Why is this distinction important? While it takes grit and self-control to be a successful heart surgeon, the same could be said about a suicide bomber. When your character education scheme fails to distinguish between doctors and terrorists, heroes and villains, it would appear to have a basic flaw. Following the KIPP growth card protocol, Bernie Madoff’s character point average, for instance, would be stellar. He was, by most accounts, an extremely hard working, charming, wildly optimistic man.

This underscores how genuinely innovative performance-based character education is with respect to eschewing values, especially religiously and civically inspired values such as honesty and service. Kindness is spotlighted in the KIPP motto (“Work Hard, Be Nice”), but it is conspicuously absent from KIPP’s official list of seven character strengths. It is not an accident that KIPP’s list of character strengths does not include items with clear moral overtones. As Levin told Tough: “The thing that I think is great about the character-strength approach is that it is fundamentally devoid of value judgment. The inevitable problem with the values-and-ethics approach is that you get into, well, whose values? Whose ethics?”

The decision to avoid overt references to values was no doubt intended to avoid the potential minefields of the “culture wars.” The trouble is that values have a way of intruding on territory that is meant to be value-free. What happens when your list of character strengths excludes empathy, justice, and service? The basic principle of
individual achievement rushes to the forefront, as if filling a vacuum. This is “tiger mother” territory here—a place where the “vulgar sense” of success prevails. Life is narrowed into an endless competition for money, status, and the next merit badge.

The third and final problem with the new character education is that it limits the purposes of education to preparation for college and career. KIPP’s central mission is to help students from “educationally underserved communities,” 95 percent of whom are African American or Latino, get “into and through” college. This is an admirable mission, given the fact that for far too long, black and Hispanic students, especially those living in poverty, have not been perceived as “college material.” African American students in particular, of course, were excluded by law and by custom from attending most of the country’s colleges and universities for well over a century. So KIPP’s college-bound mission is both noteworthy and laudable. Whether it is wise is a different question for a different day and one that engages the contentious college-for-all debate. It is worth noting, however, that those educators who have embraced performance character seem to live in a world where their students are more likely to win a Nobel Prize than earn a living as a beautician, electrician, or police officer.

While KIPP’s college-for-all orientation ultimately aims to expand opportunity, it has undeniably narrowed the scope of its character education program. KIPP and other so-called “no excuses” charter schools have latched onto the new character education as a means of eliminating the “achievement gap.” Character is treated as a kind of fuel that will help propel students through school and up the career ladder. The fact that teachers are the only people who rate students on their character growth cards is indicative of how closely character is tied to academic achievement and cognitive skills. But can we really display more than a narrow range of our character strengths in a classroom context? I can’t tell you how many of my high school friends were listless in math class but “gritty” and “zesty” on the basketball court or the football field.

If you click on the video at the top of the “Character” page on the KIPP website, you can watch a poignant clip of a parent describing how she wants her kids “to succeed” and to “have a better life.” KIPP and other similar schools are betting that the new character education will help students succeed academically and professionally. It is a risky bet, given how little we know about teaching character. It is also a bet without precedent, as there has never been a character education program so relentlessly focused on individual achievement and “objective accomplishments.” Gone are any traditional
concerns with good and evil or citizenship and the commonweal. Gone, too, the impetus to bring youngsters into the fold of a community that is larger than themselves—a hopelessly outdated sentiment, according to the new character education evangelists. Virtue is no longer its own reward.