



Jesse Owens

- James Cleveland ("Jesse") Owens was born in 1913 in a small town in Alabama to Henry and Emma Owens.
- As a child, Jesse was thin and frail, and he came near death while suffering from recurring pneumonia. But his mother nursed him back to health.
- Owens was very popular in high school. Despite being one of the few black students there, Owens was elected student body president.
- Jesse's athletic feats brought him many scholarship offers from colleges and universities. Initially he turned them down. Since he had already married at the age of 16 and needed to support his wife, he told his coach he couldn't bear the thought of living well while the rest of his family went hungry.
- He finally decided to go to Ohio State University. He met some of his fiercest competition, and not just on the track. The United States was still struggling to desegregate in 1933.
- In the 1936 Berlin Olympics, he won four gold medals: 100 meter dash, long jump, 200 meter dash, and 400 meter relay.
- Hitler came to the games but refused to greet this black athlete from the United States.
- In 1976, Jesse was awarded the highest honor a civilian of the United States can receive. President Gerald R. Ford awarded him with the Medal of Freedom. Jesse overcame segregation, racism and bigotry to prove to the world that African-Americans belonged in the world of Athletics.
- March 31, 1980 Jesse Owens, 66, died.