The Boys in the Boat

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF DANIEL JAMES BROWN

Brown grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area, and later studied English literature at Berkeley. He earned an M.A. in English from UCLA, and afterwards taught at San Jose State University and Stanford University. After many years of teaching, Brown published his first book, *Under a Flaming Sky: the Great Hinckley Firestorm of 1894* (2006). The book was a success, and enabled Brown to write a second, *The Indifferent Stars Above* (2009), about the life of Sarah Graves, a member of the Donner Party. Brown now writes full-time and lives in Seattle, Washington.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The primary historical events in *The Boys in the Boat* are the Great Depression in the United States and the rise of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party in Germany. Beginning in the late 1920s, the American economy underwent a crisis: millions of people lost their jobs, and industrial production markedly decreased. As a result, families that had never before wanted for food now starved. Around the same time, environmental disasters in the Midwest made farming almost impossible, forcing tens of thousands of farmers to abandon their property and move out to California and Washington in search of better working conditions. The book also discusses the rise of Adolf Hitler in the 1930s. Hitler rose to power in part because he was a master of propaganda; in 1936, he agreed to host the Olympic games, recognizing that he could swindle powerful people from foreign countries into thinking that his Nazi state was a model of tolerance and enlightenment. Hitler also controlled his public image with the help of propaganda filmmakers such as Leni Riefenstahl, who directed the masterful but obviously controversial *Triumph of Will*.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The Boys in the Boat alludes to relatively few works of literature; however, since much of it takes place on a college campus, it could be compared to certain "campus novels," such as *Stoner* (1965) by John Williams and *Indignation* (2008) by Philip Roth, both of which concern a working-class outsider who struggles to fit in at a prestigious college. In its focus on a United States athlete in the context of the time around World War II, the book could also be connected to *Unbroken* by Laura Hillenbrand.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Boys in the Boat: Nine Americans and Their Epic Quest for Gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics
- **When Written:** 2009-2012
- **Where Written:** Berkeley, California
- **When Published:** June 4, 2013
- **Genre:** Narrative nonfiction
- **Setting:** University of Washington, USA and Berlin, Germany, in the 1930s
- **Climax:** The rowing finals at the 1936 Olympics
- **Point of View:** Third person omniscient, with occasional first-person asides

EXTRA CREDIT

Movies and TV shows. *The Boys in the Boat* proved so popular that plans were made almost immediately to adapt it for the screen. PBS released a documentary version of the book, *The Boys of '36*, and a film version is currently in the works.

Awards collector. Brown has won or been nominated for many notable literary awards: he was a finalist for the William Saroyan International Prize for Writing, and won the 2014 Washington State Book Award for Nonfiction.

PLOT SUMMARY

In the 1930s, the United States was in the grips of the Great Depression. A huge chunk of America's population was unemployed; industry and agriculture were in ruins. During the 1930s, rowing was one of the most popular sports in the country—as popular as football or basketball in the 21st century. Most of the country's best crew programs were based out of East Coast colleges such as Harvard or Yale. Around the same time, Adolf Hitler rose to power in Germany. Based on the advice of his Minister of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, Hitler realized that he could score a major public relations victory by hosting the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin—and in so doing giving his Third Reich the image of being a benevolent, enlightened state despite its murderous treatment of "non-Aryans" and its plans for war and domination in Europe.

In the early 1930s, a young, insecure student named Joe Rantz enrolled at the University of Washington. Joe came from a working-class family from a small town; as a result, he felt that he didn't really fit in with his wealthier, elitist classmates. Joe's mother, Nellie, died when Joe was a small child, and his father, Harry Rantz, was an unreliable man who'd abandoned Joe on more than one occasion. After Nellie's death, Harry married a woman named Thula LaFollette, had several children with her, and then decided to move out with Thula and his younger

children, leaving the adolescent Joe to take care of himself. As a result of his harsh circumstances, Joe grew up lonely but also highly self-reliant. He chopped wood to earn money, fished in rivers to find food, and somehow managed to maintain excellent grades in school throughout his teen years. Joe also had a steady girlfriend, Joyce Simdars.

At the University of Washington, Joe tried out for the crew team, coached by the highly respected Al Ulbrickson. Ulbrickson believed that rowers should excel in all aspects of life. He also stressed that trying out for crew would be an exhausting, year-long process. By the end of his freshmen year, however, Joe had made it onto the team, partly because he was used to working hard and enduring pain. Joe also benefited from the coaching of Tom Bolles, the freshman coach, and the world-class shells (rowing boats) designed by George Yeoman Pocock, an English boatbuilder who'd moved to Washington in the 1920s. Between Ulbrickson, Pocock, and Bolles, the University of Washington was making a name for itself as a crew program on the national stage. Its chief rival on the West Coast was the crew program at U. C. Berkeley, coached by the charismatic Ky Ebright. In April of his freshman year, Joe and the other freshmen raced against the freshman team from Cal and won decisively, boding well for their careers in the next three years. Joe and the freshmen also competed at the Hudson Regatta in Poughkeepsie, New York, where they triumphed against better-known East Coast teams.

Around the same time, Adolf Hitler was preparing to host the 1936 Berlin Olympics. Goebbels ordered that a massive Olympic stadium be built, and that the city of Berlin be purged of all evidence of Nazi tyranny. Romani families, who'd been treated cruelly under the Third Reich, were forcibly removed from Berlin; tragically, most of them were later murdered in Nazi death camps. Goebbels also took precautions to ensure that journalists visiting Berlin for the Olympics wouldn't be able to interview local Jews about their plight under Hitler. Meanwhile, Hitler commissioned the filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl to make documentaries glorifying Fascist ideals. In the mid-1930s, there were international movements to boycott the Berlin Olympics, headed by political activists who recognized the danger Hitler posed to the world. However, Avery Brundage, the president of the American Olympic Committee and an anti-Semite himself, refused to entertain the idea of a boycott.

Meanwhile Joe spent his college summers working hard to support himself for the upcoming school year. He continued to feel alienated from his father, stepmother, and half-siblings. Even though they lived in Seattle, very close to his school, Thula prevented Joe from seeing the rest of his family. During Joe's sophomore year (1934-35) Joe was distracted, in part because of his tragic family situation, and in part because he still felt out of place at the University of Washington. Ulbrickson, determined to send a Washington team to the Olympics in 1936, experimented with different combinations of athletes. He began to realize that while the program had many talented rowers, his students weren't working together to achieve the synchronicity and close cooperation—in a word, "**swing**"—necessary for Olympic victory. Washington teams triumphed against Cal in April of 1935, but Washington's varsity team (which didn't include Joe) failed to win at the Hudson regatta.

Joe spent the summer of 1935 working on the Grand Coulee dam, alongside several of his teammates. Joe began to realize that he wasn't as out of place at Washington as he'd supposed—many of his teammates hailed from similar working-class backgrounds. Joe began to develop close friendships with many of his teammates and, in the process, became a better team-player and a better rower. When he returned to school in the fall, Joe befriended Pocock, who told him about the religious experience of rowing in swing with one's teammates. For the fall and spring, Ulbrickson experimented with different combinations of rowers, eventually settling on a hybrid of sophomores, juniors, and seniors, including Joe. Ulbrickson's experiments paid off when the Washington varsity team decimated the competition on the East and West Coasts, earning a spot on the American Olympic team.

At the Berlin Olympics, Joe and his teammates faced a series of challenges. Don Hume, the team's talented stroke, fell seriously ill on the transatlantic voyage to Germany. Furthermore, the team was distracted by the pleasures of Berlin—which, thanks to Goebbels, had been reimagined as a beautiful, tolerant city for its international visitors. The team defeated England in its preliminary heat, and made it to the finals. Despite being placed in the worst lane in the final race, and despite the coxswain Bobby Moch's failure to notice that the race had begun, the American team triumphed against its competition, winning Olympic gold. Joe was overjoyed by his team's achievement: after years of loneliness and insecurity, he finally felt that he was part of something great. By defeating the competition, Brown notes, the Americans also dealt a powerful blow to Hitler's pseudoscientific theories of Nazi superiority, prophesizing Hitler's eventual defeat in World War Two.

Back in the states, Joe married his sweetheart, Joyce. The 1936 American rowing team went on to successful careers in a variety of fields, and many of them remained close friends for the rest of their long lives. Joe remained married to Joyce for his whole life, and had a long, successful career working for Boeing. He died in the 2000s, his life's story largely unknown to the public, but inspiring for anyone who knew it.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Tom Bolles – Tom Bolles is the freshman coach at the

University of Washington for most of the book. As a result, he's one of the first people to recognize the enormous talent of Joe Rantz, Roger Morris, and their peers. Bolles is also instrumental in developing the rowing strategy that helps Joe and his teammates win again and again: a low stroke rate, supported with power and perfect technique. In 1936, following Washington's spectacular victory at the annual Hudson Regatta in Poughkeepsie, Bolles takes a job at Harvard University, the quintessential East Coast crew program—somewhat ironically, considering all he did to put Washington's West Coast program on the map.

Joe Rantz – Although Daniel James Brown has described *The Boys in the Boat* as an "ensemble piece," Joe Rantz is the closest thing in the book to a main character. Joe is emblematic of the 1936 American rowing team in general: he came from a poor family, struggled to support himself during the Great Depression, and exhibited extraordinary drive, determination, and ambition. Rantz lost his mother when he was still a child; afterwards, his father, Harry Rantz, married a woman named Thula LaFollette, who seems to have disliked Joe greatly. Harry and Thula abandoned Joe and forced him to support himself while he was still a minor; amazingly, Joe managed to pay his way through the University of Washington. It was here that Joe became a rower. However, in order to become a world-class athlete, Joe had to conquer his shyness and intense individualism—he had to learn how to work with his eight teammates in order to row as efficiently and powerfully as possible. Ultimately, *The Boys in the Boat* is a story about teamwork, and over the course of the book, Joe learns how to work with a team—both in the literal sense of cooperating with his rowing team and in the more metaphorical sense of opening up to other people, such as his girlfriend, Joyce Simdars.

Adolf Hitler – Fascist dictator who ruled Germany from the 1930s to 1945, and was responsible for leading his country into war with Europe, triggering the start of World War Two. Hitler's murderous racist beliefs also resulted in the Holocaust, and the death of millions of Jews and other non-Aryan people. While Daniel James Brown offers relatively little information about Hitler's personal life in *The Boys in the Boat*, Hitler is an important character in the book: a master of propaganda who recognized that the 1936 Olympic games, hosted in Germany, could be "spun" to make Germany seem like an enlightened, egalitarian society, instead of the nightmarish police state it was rapidly becoming.

George Yeoman Pocock – George Yeoman Pocock was one of the key figures in the history of rowing. The descendant of generations of accomplished boatmakers in England, Pocock grew up learning about the subtleties of rowing and woodworking, and by the time he was twenty, had already become a highly accomplished designer of rowing shells. Pocock didn't come from a wealthy family, but he had the talent and ambition to educate himself far beyond what was expected of his class at the time. After moving to the United States, Pocock became the world's premiere builder of rowing shells, and throughout the 1930s, he was a key mentor and advisor on the University of Washington rowing team. In particular, Pocock sympathized with Joe Rantz's working-class anxieties and uncertainties.

Joyce Simdars – Joe Rantz's beloved girlfriend, and later his wife, Joyce Simdars is a lovely, kind woman and, like Joe, highly intelligent and ambitious. Joyce comes from a devoutly Christian family, in which there seems to be little overt affection. Partly as a result, she's drawn to Joe's warm, loving personality. Joyce takes a series of difficult jobs to pay her way through the University of Washington; shortly after Joe wins a gold medal at the Olympics, she marries him, and they stay together for the rest of her life.

Al Ulbrickson – Al Ulbrickson is the calm, quiet head coach for the University of Washington crew program. For most of the book, he's worried that he's going to lose his job: again and again, he loses important races to his rival, Ky Ebright, the talented crew coach for the University of California at Berkeley. Ulbrickson experiments with many different strategies and team combinations before settling on the nine rowers who go on to win at the 1936 Olympics. Ulbrickson is an exceptionally talented coach, and even today, he's remembered as one of the best in American history. He pushes his rowers to achieve more than they think possible, and forces them to eat well, abstain from alcohol, and maintain a high grade point average. That Ulbrickson believes that his rowers must be successful all-around, not just in the boat, partly explains why none of the nine boys in the boat "burned out" after 1936—they all went on to have relatively happy, successful, and well-rounded lives.

Harry Rantz – The father of Joe Rantz, Harry Rantz is a complicated figure. He has a major influence on his son Joe's development: Joe seems to inherit his curiosity and love for learning from his father, a talented mechanic and inventor. However, Harry is also an unpredictable, often senseless man, who refuses to commit to anything he doesn't want to do. After the death of his first wife, Joe's father abandons Joe, then marries Thula LaFollette, and then abandons Joe *again*. Harry's negligence as a father is perhaps the most important reason why Joe grows up learning to take care of himself—Joe learns not to rely on his father for food, shelter, or love.

Thula LaFollette (Rantz) – Joe Rantz's stepmother (and, technically, sister-in-law) and Harry Rantz's second wife, Thula LaFollette is a highly talented but frustrated woman. She excels at playing the violin, but finds few outlets for her artistry, especially after marrying Harry, who forces her to move to miserable mining towns across the Northwest. Thula takes out much of her frustration on Joe Rantz, and eventually she convinces Harry to move away and abandon his son for good. Thelma is a cruel, self-centered woman, who seems to feel no

compunction about leaving a boy to feed himself, but it's still possible to sympathize with her—like so many women at the time, she had no outlet for her talents and ambitions.

Joseph Goebbels – The Minister of Propaganda under Adolf Hitler, Joseph Goebbels was a vain, cruel, manipulative man, but had an undeniable genius for propaganda. It was Goebbels, not Hitler, who first realized that the Olympic games could be a major *coup* for the Nazi state, since it would give Hitler a chance to trick the world into thinking that Germany was an enlightened, peaceful place. Goebbels was perhaps more responsible than any other single person for the success of the 1936 Olympic games; thanks to his careful manipulations of public opinion, thousands of powerful politicians and diplomats left Berlin singing Hitler's praises.

Ky Ebright – The highly talented coach of the University of California at Berkeley rowing team, Ky Ebright is Al Ulbrickson's rival throughout the book. Having coached Olympic gold medalists in the past, Ebright is eager to repeat his feat in the 1936 games, but in the end, he recognizes that Ulbrickson has the finer team.

Bobby Moch – The highly intelligent, talented coxswain for the University of Washington rowing team, Bobby Moch plays a pivotal role in the rowers' success. A master strategist, Moch uses his quick thinking to size up his competition and determine the best strategy for each race. Moch goes on to attend Harvard Law School and become one of the most prominent attorneys in the Pacific Northwest.

Roger Morris – One of the nine "boys in the boat" who rowed to Olympic gold in 1936, Roger Morris is an ambitious student at the University of Washington. Like many of the other rowers, he comes from a relatively poor family, meaning that he has to work hard to support himself through college. Unlike most of the other freshman rowers, Roger has some experience with rowing, since he grew up near water.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Leni Riefenstahl – Leni Riefenstahl was an influential director of Nazi propaganda films (including the masterful but controversial *Triumph of the Will*), and a close friend of Adolf Hitler. During the 1936 Olympics, she shot footage for her 1938 film *Olympia*, and frequently quarreled with her rival, Joseph Goebbels.

Don Hume – The "stroke" for the Washington crew team, Don Hume plays a pivotal role in his team's success at the 1936 Olympics, even though he's extremely ill at the time.

Shorty Hunt – An excellent rower for the University of Washington, Shorty Hunt is a charismatic but insecure young man. In order to row to Olympic success, he has to overcome some of his anxiety and self-doubt.

Jim McMillin – One of the nine "boys in the boat" for the 1936 Olympics, Jim McMillin is one of Joe Rantz's closest friends, in part because he comes from a similar socioeconomic background, and has a similar sense of humility and determination.

Gordy Adam – One of the nine "boys in the boat" for the 1936 Olympics.

Johnny White – One of the nine "boys in the boat" for the 1936 Olympics.

Chuck Day – One of the nine "boys in the boat" for the 1936 Olympics.

George Morry – A coxswain for the University of Washington crew team.

Merton Hatch – A talented rower on the University of Washington team, who Joe Rantz ultimately replaces for the 1936 varsity team.

Broussais C. Beck Jr. – A talented, spoiled varsity rower for the University of Washington.

Bob Green – A sophomore rower for the University of Washington.

Don Coy – The alternate for America's 1936 Olympic rowing team.

Alma – Joe Rantz's aunt, who raises him immediately after the death of his mother, Nellie Maxwell.

Royal Brougham – Sports editor for the *Post-Intelligencer*, and an important factor in turning the University of Washington crew team into a national sensation.

Avery Brundage – President of the American Olympic Committee, and possibly an anti-Semite.

Russell Callow – Crew coach at the University of Washington during the early 1920s.

Hiram Conibear – The rowing coach for the University of Washington in the early 1910s.

Paul Coughlin – The head of the University of Washington alumni association.

John Noel Duckworth – Coxswain for Britain's 1936 Olympic rowing team.

William George Ranald Mundell Laurie – Stroke for Britain's 1936 Olympic rowing team.

Hermann Göring – A powerful official in Adolf Hitler's Third Reich, and the official Marshal of the Reichstag (effectively making him second in command to Hitler himself).

Eleanor Holm – A gold medalist in swimming, who was banned from the 1936 Olympic games for heavy drinking.

Fritz Kreisler – A famous West Coast violinist.

Fred Rantz – The older brother of Joe Rantz, Fred Rantz shares many personal qualities with Joe: especially his ambition and drive.

Thelma LaFollette – The wife (and, technically, step-aunt) of Fred Rantz, and the sister of Thula LaFollette.

Joe Louis – Acclaimed African American boxer who defended his heavyweight title for more than a decade between the 1930s and 1940s.

Werner March – German architect who helped designed the 1936 Olympic stadium.

Nellie Maxwell – The mother of Joe Rantz and the first wife of Harry Rantz, Nellie dies of throat cancer while Joe is still a young child.

Charlie McDonald – An older neighbor of Joe Rantz during Joe's lonely years of supporting himself, and one of Joe's few friends.

Jesse Owens – Perhaps the most famous athlete who competed in the 1936 Olympic games, Jesse Owens was an African American track star whose success in Berlin defied the Nazis' racist theories about Aryan superiority.

Dick Pocock – Brother of George Yeoman Pocock.

Harry Rantz Junior – The child of Harry Rantz and Thula LaFollette.

Judy Rantz – Joe Rantz's beloved daughter.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt – Thirty-second president of the United States, who presided over the country for most of the Great Depression and World War Two.

Franklin Roosevelt Junior – Son of Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Max Schmeling – The world heavyweight boxing champion, who defeated Joe Louis in 1936, but later lost decisively to Louis.

Harry Secor – A friend of Joe Rantz.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

TEAMWORK AND TRUST

Perhaps the most important theme of *The Boys in the Boat* is teamwork, both in the sense of working as part of a literal team and the metaphorical sense of trusting and cooperating with other people. In the book, Daniel James Brown examines the 1936 American Olympic rowing team, made up mostly of juniors from the University of Washington. In order to succeed at the Berlin Olympics, the Americans had to learn how to work together to achieve a common goal—a gold medal. As the book explains, rowing is one of the most collaborative sports: on an eight-oar rowing team, all eight rowers must move in perfect or near-perfect synchronization. Even a tiny mistake can throw off the delicate rhythm of the team. Because oarsmen need to move together so precisely, they must develop a close psychological bond of friendship and respect to succeed. *The Boys in the Boat* isn't just the story of how the 1936 Olympic rowers perfected their technique and power; it's about how the nine teammates (eight oarsmen plus a coxswain) learned to work together, and became lifelong friends in the process.

In particular, Brown studies the importance of teamwork by documenting the life of one of the nine Olympic team members: Joe Rantz. Joe's life probably captures the importance of trust, cooperation, and respect more succinctly than that of any of his teammates. Joe's early life was full of tragedy, which pushed him to become more isolated and individualistic. His mother died when he was a child; shortly afterwards, his father, Harry Rantz, fled to Canada, leaving Joe to live with his aunt. A few years later, Harry married another woman, Thula LaFollette, and began taking care of his son once again. But then he and Thula decided to move away and leave Joe, not yet an adult, to fend for himself. Joe rose to the task of providing for himself with impressive initiative and drive—the very qualities that later made him an excellent rower. But he also trained himself not to rely on any other human beings—after so many years of betrayal and disappointment, he concluded that he couldn't depend on anyone other than himself.

When he attended the University of Washington and joined the crew team, though, Joe's independence proved to be a liability. He was a talented athlete, but because he was hesitant to befriend his teammates or form a bond of trust with them, he struggled to grow from a good rower into a great one. In his junior year, however, Joe began to let some of his defenses come down—and, not coincidentally, he became a much better rower. He spent a summer working alongside two of his teammates and received expert advice from George Pocock, the Washington team's adviser and a renowned boatmaker. Pocock encouraged Joe to trust his teammates—he had no choice but to depend on them in the heat of the race. Pocock characterized a good crew team's trust and teamwork as a kind of religious ecstasy. Over the course of the book, then, Joe begins to open up with his teammates, eventually becoming so close with them that they were able to get into **swing**—i.e., row in perfect unison—almost without trying. By the end of 1936, the University of Washington team was the best in the world: not just because of the individual rowers' strength or form, but because all nine teammates had learned to work together.

It's often said that the way people play sports represents the way they live their lives. In the case of the 1936 rowing team, the cliché is true: having developed such a close bond, the nine teammates exceled at working with other people for the rest of

their lives. Many of the teammates remained friends for decades to come; indeed, Joe Rantz was still close with his teammate Roger Morris in the 2000s. Furthermore, many of the teammates worked at Boeing together. In spite of his lonely, isolated early years, Joe Rantz had a long, happy life: he had a great job, a loving wife, and wonderful friends. As the book suggests, Joe finally achieved the "religious experience" to which George Pocock alluded. Furthermore, once he learned how to embrace the special feeling of trust and teamwork as a rower, Joe continued to embrace that feeling in every area of his life.

SPORTS, POLITICS, AND COMMUNITY

The Boys in the Boat isn't just a book about rowers; it's also about the political role that athletic events play in different communities. In the first half of the 20th century, rowing was one of the most popular American sports—as popular as football or basketball in the 21st century. Teams from around the country traveled to compete, with tens of thousands of fans watching and millions more listening via the radio. As a result, cheering for one's crew team was more than just a form of entertainment; it was a way of celebrating one's town, one's state, or even one's country. Rowing is a very challenging sport, requiring tremendous strength and intelligence, not to mention a huge amount of practice. By cheering for rowers, then, fans were celebrating the best their communities had to offer—in other words, celebrating their communities themselves. Furthermore, supporting one's community became especially important during the Great Depression, the period during which the book is set. With millions of people out of work, and an overall mood of despair in the air, cheering for rowers was a powerful way to honor community at a time when many people felt that their communities were falling apart.

The Boys in the Boat shows that sports can be an important way to celebrate one's community—and, furthermore, put that community on the map. Throughout the 1920s and 30s, the state of Washington invested considerable resources in its rowing programs, because it believed—rightly so, it would seem—that a successful crew program would bring respect and attention to the state. The mayor of Seattle raised considerable funds to send the University of Washington crew team to Poughkeepsie for the annual Hudson Regatta—in effect, the national championship—and later the 1936 Olympic games. In the long run, the mayor's investment paid off big: Washington's victories at Poughkeepsie and Berlin made it a magnet for aspiring rowers, coaches, and boatbuilders (to this day, the University of Washington has one of the best crew programs in the world). Furthermore, the crew team's success may have attracted tourists and popularized the city of Seattle at a time when many Americans hadn't even heard of it.

But there's more than one way for sports to put a community on the map. In addition to exploring the role of crew in Washington state history, *The Boys in the Boat* shows how the Nazis used sports to bring their country an undeserved reputation for enlightenment and tolerance. When Germany hosted the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, the government went to great lengths to make Berlin seem perfect in every way: beautiful, well-organized, and—most importantly—tolerant of all people. Hosting the Olympics in Berlin put Germany on the map in the sense that it reminded the world of Germany's athletic excellence. But it also sent a subtly different message: that Germany was a bastion of peace, simply by virtue of the fact that it was hosting the countries of the world. (See "Propaganda" theme.) In all, the book demonstrates the importance of athletics for different communities. Athletes are like ambassadors, competing on behalf of a community—or else standing for peace and tolerance by competing alongside athletes from *other* communities. Put another way, sports is a political weapon, which can be used for purposes benign (the Seattle state government subsidizing its crew programs) or malicious (Adolf Hitler's decision to host the Olympics).

CLASS

Another major theme of *The Boys in the Boat* is class, and particularly the conflict between different socioeconomic classes. The book takes place during the Great Depression, an era when the collapse of the stock market and the decline of industry threatened to wipe out the middle class. Many families that had never wanted for food were thrust into poverty for the first time. At a school such as the University of Washington, where the book is set, the divide between the wealthiest and the poorest Americans was particularly stark. Some of the university's students had never worked a day in their lives, while others, such as Joe Rantz, could only *be* university students because they'd previously been working full-time jobs. Through the character of Joe Rantz, Daniel James Brown studies the bullying and discrimination that working-class Americans often have to endure, and how some Americans succeeded in overcoming their persecution.

At the University of Washington, Joe encountered endless class discrimination. He came from a poor family, and he had to support himself since the age of fifteen, often working full-time just to feed himself and put a roof over his head. On the other hand, some of his classmates came from wealthy families, and had no experience working for a living. They teased Joe for his frumpy clothing, his unpolished manners, and other things that signified his working-class roots. Joe was particularly conscious of the divide between upper-class and working-class as a member of the university rowing team. Traditionally, rowing is one of the most elitist, exclusive sports, available only for those who can afford to buy boats or pay membership at elite athletic clubs. Thus, when he tried out for the team as a freshmen, Joe

drew snickers from other, wealthier rowing hopefuls.

Over the course of the book, however, Joe and his working-class teammates fought back against class discrimination in a few different ways. To begin with, Joe came to understand that he wasn't alone in his working-class roots; indeed, most of the other talented underclassman rowers hailed from relatively poor families, and had to work for a living. Thus, Joe developed strong friendships with his teammates, based on their talents but also their common heritage. In doing so, Joe and his friends challenged the old stereotype that crew was a "rich man's sport." Most basically of all, however, Joe and his friends fought against classism simply by being better than anyone else. As Joe went through college, winning impressive rowing titles, his wealthier peers teased him less and less; indeed, he became a citywide hero because of his talents. (Of course, this optimistic theme then has a darker side to it—that less privileged people have to be better-than-average just to be considered the equals of their more privileged peers.)

The book further suggests that Joe became a great rower *because* of his working-class roots; in rowing, he found the perfect outlet for his toughness, his focus, and his ability to withstand pain. Not only did he try out for the richest, most elitist sport on campus; he found ways of turning his poor, decidedly *non*-elite origins into a major advantage when he played the sport. In the end, *The Boys in the Boat* tells an optimistic, inspiring story about class in America. Even if few Americans are as talented as Joe and his teammates, they can use their ambition, talent, and determination to find success, defying the entitled bullies who tell them they'll never amount to anything.

EAST VERSUS WEST

The Boys in the Boat explores the vast cultural divide between the Eastern and Western United States in the early twentieth century. While the idea of an "East-West" rivalry is still a big part of American society, especially when it comes to sports, many of the differences between Eastern and Western America have disappeared in the last century. In the 1930s, communities on opposite sides of the U.S. didn't necessarily have access to the same culture; they listened to different music, used different slang, ate different foods, and often respected subtly different values. This shouldn't suggest that the East and West Coasts had nothing in common in the 1930s—nor should it suggest that Eastern and Western American cultures are identical in the twenty-first century. Nevertheless, in the era before the Internet, commercial aviation, or television, the East-West divide was undoubtedly starker than it is today. Furthermore, the East-West divide was especially apparent in the world of competitive rowing.

In part, there was a major East-West rowing rivalry during the 1930s because there really were major cultural differences between the Eastern and Western United States at the time. In the Eastern United States, WASP (i.e., white Anglo-Saxon protestant) culture dominated, and a huge portion of society's elites hailed from traditionally WASP-y schools such as Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. These schools were also renowned for their rowing programs, the oldest (and usually regarded as the best) in the country. In this sense, East Coast crew teams represented the epitome of WASP-y, East Coast culture. By contrast, the Western United States in the 1930s was significantly more rural than the East, and lacked universities with the pedigree of a Harvard or a Yale. Recognizing the authentic differences between East and West, sports journalists wrote stories about crew competitions between West and East Coast that emphasized the "clash of cultures"—the refined Ivy League Easterners versus the rough, tough Westerners.

While there was some truth in the way sports journalists covered East-West crew competitions in the 1930s, journalists also exaggerated the contrast between different teams to make for a more entertaining story. For example, the often-repeated stereotype that Harvard and Yale's crew programs were more "refined" than Cal's or Washington's was simply untrue: in the 1930s, Washington had the most precise, technically perfect rowers in the world. Similarly, sports journalists of the 1920s and 1930s often wrote stories suggesting that East Coast crew teams had stronger ties with Europe (where the sport originated). If anything, the West Coast had the stronger connection with European (particularly English) crew culture, since George Pocock, the finest boatmaker in the world and a masterful rower in his own right, served as an adviser for the University of Washington. Altogether, the East-West crew rivalry of the 1930s was partly a legitimate rivalry between two different American cultures and partly manufactured by sports journalists trying to sell more newspapers. (Daniel James Brown even suggests that, in some cases, the East-West rivalry was a self-fulfilling prophecy, in the sense that it *encouraged* crew programs to exaggerate their stereotypically East or West Coast qualities.) There are still plenty of East-West sports rivalries in 21st century America, but the East-West crew rivalry of the 1930s emphasizes the point that sports rivalries are a great way for different cultures to celebrate themselves, and that, almost a century ago, America was probably far more regionalized and culturally heterogeneous than it is today.

PROPAGANDA

While the majority of *The Boys in the Boat* is about the American crew programs of the 1930s, the rest of the book is about the 1936 Olympic games in Berlin, Germany, hosted and organized by the Fascist government of Adolf Hitler. Working with his Minister of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, and the filmmaker Leni

Riefenstahl, Hitler instituted a top-to-bottom makeover for Berlin, which manipulated thousands of foreign athletes, politicians, and diplomats into thinking that the city—and, by extension, Nazi Germany—was the height of civilization and enlightenment. The book poses two important questions about the 1936 Olympics: first, what strategies did the Nazi propaganda apparatus use to disguise Germany's human rights abuses and make Germany appear tolerant?; second why were these strategies effective in fooling so many people?

In part, the fact that so many people left the 1936 Berlin Olympics impressed with Nazi Germany testifies to the disturbing ingenuity of Nazi propaganda. At a time when Hitler was instituting a series of brutal, repressive laws, Goebbels essentially rebuilt the city of Berlin to make it appear as open and inviting as possible. Goebbels passed ordinances to evict homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, the disabled, and dozens of other groups that Hitler had targeted, and send these groups far from Berlin. In doing so, he ensured that there would be very few people in Berlin who could testify to the full cruelty of the Nazi state. Goebbels also stocked bookstores with works that Hitler had banned previously—in all, making Berlin seem to be a city of happy, tolerant people, rather than the nightmarish police state Hitler had created. At the same time, the Ministry of Propaganda endeavored to make Germany seem strong and imposing. The director Leni Riefenstahl made films that glorified the Aryan racial ideal, around which Hitler had constructed his government. The Ministry also designed a massive Olympic stadium whose proportions symbolized Germany's awesome power. In a way, the Nazis' Olympic propaganda was an extension of Hitler's foreign policy in the mid-1930s: showcasing Germany's strength while also emphasizing its benevolence. Because of the contributions of Riefenstahl, Goebbels, and other Nazi propagandists, the 1936 Olympics successfully convinced powerful foreigners that the Nazi regime should be respected and admired.

But Nazi Olympic propaganda didn't succeed simply because it was ingenious. The disturbing truth is that many people praised Hitler's Fascist state after the Olympics because they weren't interested in protecting the groups Hitler targeted, or even shared some of Hitler's hatred for these groups. During the 1930s, anti-Semitism was rampant in Europe and the United States, and plenty of powerful people were willing to ignore Hitler's long, unambiguous record of hatred for the Jews. Even after thousands of prominent Jewish writers and intellectuals called for the United States to boycott the 1936 Olympics, Avery Brundage—the president of the American Olympic Committee, and a notorious anti-Semite himself—insisted that America would be attending. Brundage offered a series of flippant, offensive justifications for his decision, betraying his indifference to Jewish rights and arguably his approval for Hitler's racist policies. As Brown makes clear, Brundage was far from an outlier in the 1930s—there were far too many powerful anti-Semites in America at the time. While very few of these people would have approved of the Holocaust, many of them were willing to look the other way at Hitler's early anti-Semitic policies. In all, Nazi Olympic propaganda succeeded in fooling the public because it was designed by masters, but also because it appealed to people's *willingness* to be fooled. One could say the same about propaganda in general: it caters to people's indifference and their tacit tolerance for injustice.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE HUSKY CLIPPER

The *Husky Clipper*, the shell that the "boys in the boat" row to Olympic victory in 1936, symbolizes the collaborative nature of the sport of rowing, and the overall story and victory of Joe Rantz's Washington team. United in the pursuit of glory, the nine oarsmen—along with their coaches, as well as George Pocock, the boat's designer—work together to win a gold medal.

SWING

The idea of "swing," the state during which oarsmen row in perfect synchronicity (and also row most effectively), symbolizes the unity and bond of brotherhood between the nine American rowers at the 1936 Olympics. Swing is described as a kind of ideal state of harmony, one that can only be achieved when all the rowers trust and respect each other. The brotherhood and togetherness of "swing" is also implicitly contrasted to the murderous hatred and racism that motivated Hitler and the Nazis.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Books edition of *The Boys in the Boat* published in 2014.

Prologue Quotes

I shook Joe's hand again and told him I would like to come back and talk to him some more, and that I'd like to write a book about his rowing days. Joe grasped my hand again and said he'd like that, but then his voice broke once more and he admonished me gently, "But not just about me. It has to be about the boat."

Related Characters: Joe Rantz (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

In the Prologue to *the Boys in the Boat*, Daniel James Brown meets Joe Rantz, the closest thing to a protagonist in the book. Joe Rantz won an Olympic gold medal at the 1936 Berlin games, and lived a long, fruitful life—even so, his life's story remains relatively obscure (especially when compared with that of Jesse Owens, the most famous American athlete at the '36 games). Brown wants to write a book about Joe's life, but he doesn't know how to begin to tell Joe's story. Joe's advice is simple: tell a story "about the boat."

Joe isn't speaking literally, of course—he doesn't want the story to just be about the physical boat, the *Husky Clipper*, that the team rowed in in Berlin. Rather, his point is that any story about Joe's rowing career must do justice to the feeling of solidarity, cooperation, and trust that arose between Joe and his peers as they approached the Berlin games. A good crew team works as a single, cohesive unit: the rowers must be highly adept at responding to one another's bodily cues and staying "in swing" throughout the duration of the race. Thus, it's no coincidence that many great crew teams remain friends for years—Joe and his peers were no exception.

Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ And perhaps that was the worst of it. Whether you were a banker or a baker, a homemaker or homeless, it was with you night and day—a terrible, unrelenting uncertainty about the future, a feeling that the ground could drop out from under you for good at any moment.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

This passage sets the scene for the rest of book, which takes place during the Great Depression, a time when the American economy was tanking and industry and agriculture were barely surviving. Millions of Americans were out of work, and the overall spirit of the country was slowly fading away: Americans looked ahead to the future with a general sense of dread.

It's important for the book to situate its narrative in the Great Depression, since, in many ways, Joe and his teammates became symbols of hope for millions of Americans who desperate for it. At the time, rowing was a highly popular sport, and when the University of Washington crew team began doing well on the national stage, Americans across the country tuned in to the radio to learn about their successes. In times of crisis, people need entertainment more than ever—and in the 1930s, rowing was one of the America's favorite forms of entertainment.

❝ And Hitler, as he listened to Goebbels, and knowing full well what he had planned for Germany in the days, months, and years ahead, had slowly begun to recognize the value in presenting a more attractive face to the world than his brown-shirted storm troopers and his black-shirted security forces had displayed thus far. At the very least, an Olympic interlude would help buy him time—time to convince the world of his peaceful intentions, even as he began to rebuild Germany's military and industrial power for the titanic struggle to come.

Related Characters: Joseph Goebbels, Adolf Hitler

Related Themes:

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

Although the majority of the book is about Joe Rantz and his teammates at the University of Washington, the book's other plotline concerns the Third Reich led by Adolf Hitler. Hitler rose to power around the same time that Joe Rantz enrolled at the University of Washington. Assuming (as Brown does) that Hitler had all of his future actions already planned out, he realized that he needed to trick the world into believing that he was a peaceful, benevolent leader, so that they would appease him for as long as possible. With the advice of his Minister of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, Hitler decided that he would host the 1936 Olympic games in Berlin, thereby using the Olympics as a political weapon. The Nazis were masters of propaganda: they understood that they could use mass media to lie about their motives and the concrete realities of their country. During the games, Goebbels arranged for Berlin to be portrayed in the most favorable light possible, obscuring the barbarism of Hitler's regime.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ The hurting was taking its toll, and that was just fine with Joe. Hurting was nothing new to him.

Related Characters: Joe Rantz

Related Themes:

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

During his freshman year, Joe Rantz tried out for the University of Washington crew team. He was told, again and again, that trying out for crew would be one of the most challenging things he ever did. While rowing every evening for three hours—as the freshman hopefuls were required to do—was taxing, Joe didn't mind the physical pain as much as some of his classmates did. Joe grew up in an impoverished home, and he was accustomed to taking care of himself, going hungry, etc. In short, Joe braved more adversity in his first eighteen years than some people do in their entire lives. As a result, the physical challenges of rowing were nothing new to him. The passage is especially important because it suggests that Joe's difficult childhood—for which he was mocked and teased again and again during his time in college—was actually an asset when it came to rowing, because it conditioned him to work hard and never give up.

Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ It didn't help that [Joe Rantz] continued to feel like everyone's poor cousin. With the weather remaining cool, he still had to wear his ragged sweater to practice almost every day, and the boys still teased him continuously for it.

Related Characters: Joe Rantz

Related Themes:

Page Number: 91

Explanation and Analysis

Although Joe Rantz continued to succeed as a rower, he faced considerable adversity on the University of Washington campus. His classmates, many of whom hailed from wealthy families in big cities, mocked Joe for his cheap, ragged clothing and somewhat unpolished manners. The teasing that Joe endured at college took a significant toll on his life overall. He began to question whether he belonged at college in the first place, and he found that he wasn't able to focus on rowing—he was too distracted by his own insecurities. In short, in order to succeed as an Olympic rower, Joe didn't only have to train extensively; he had to strengthen his psychological defenses against bullying and build self-confidence.

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ The next year, 1924, Washington returned, with a young Al Ulbrickson rowing at stroke, and won the varsity race again, decisively this time. In 1926 they did it yet again, this time with Ulbrickson rowing the final quarter of a mile with a torn muscle in one arm. In 1928, Ky Ebright's California Bears won their first Poughkeepsie title en route to winning the Olympics that year and again in 1932. By 1934 the western schools were finally beginning to be taken seriously.

Related Characters: Al Ulbrickson, Ky Ebright

Related Themes:

Page Number: 113

Explanation and Analysis

For a long time, East Coast rowing programs were the only major crew programs in America. Rowing was a popular sport, but there were no crew programs on the West Coast that could rival Harvard's or Yale's. However, this all began to change in the 1920s and 1930s, when programs at the University of Washington and U. C. Berkeley began to give Harvard and Yale a run for their money. Furthermore, Cal's crew program sent a team to the 1932 Olympics and won, cementing the point that East Coast crew wasn't the be-all, end-all of college rowing. The East-West rivalry intensified throughout the 1930s, and it persists today (although mostly in other sports, such as football and basketball). The rivalry was (and is) a good way for two different regions of the United States to celebrate their cultural identities and rally together in support for their teams.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ Back in February [Al Ulbrickson] had commented [...] that "there are more good individual men on this year's squad than on any I have coached." The fundamental problem lay in the fact that he had felt compelled to throw that word "individual" into the sentence. There were too many days when they rowed not as crews but as boatfuls of individuals. The more he scolded them for personal technical issues, even as he preached teamsmanship, the more the boys seemed to sink into their own separate and sometimes defiant little worlds.

Related Characters: Al Ulbrickson (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 158

Explanation and Analysis

By this point in the book, Al Ulbrickson, the dedicated coach of the University of Washington crew team, has realized his students' principle weakness: they're excellent rowers, but they don't understand how to work as a team. The best rowing teams, Ulbrickson argued, were cohesive units, made up of rowers who knew how to exactly adjust their strokes to one another's pacing. Put another way, a team of decent rowers who work well together will often defeat a team of highly talented rowers who can't get into "swing."

The passage is important because it sets the direction for the middle third of the book: Ulbrickson attempting to teach his students how to work together. Throughout 1934 and 1935, he experimented with different combinations of athletes, hoping that one of these combinations would click. Ulbrickson's goal was to help his rowers get into "swing"—in other words, find a natural rhythm that allowed them to row most efficiently, in almost perfect synchronicity.

❝ As Joe raised a hand to acknowledge the wave of applause rising to greet him, he found himself struggling desperately to keep back tears. He had never let himself dream of standing in a place like this, surrounded by people like these. It startled him but at the same time it also filled him with gratitude, and as he stood at the front of the room that day acknowledging the applause, he felt a sudden surge of something unfamiliar—a sense of pride that was deeper and more heartfelt than any he had ever felt before.

Related Characters: Joe Rantz

Related Themes:

Page Number: 170-171

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of his sophomore year, Joe scored a major victory in rowing. He and his teammates did exceptionally well in the annual race against Cal, proving to Ulbrickson that they had the potential to row in the Olympics. Joe and his teammates were honored for their success with a visit to the Seattle mayor's office. There, Joe was overjoyed: he couldn't believe that he'd risen to the point where he was shaking hands with wealthy and famous people like this.

The passage is a good example of how Joe's rowing prowess—not to mention his courage and dedication—helps him achieve great success in the world. Joe was born to a poor family that didn't take good care of him, but due to his perseverance and talent, he achieved considerable success in life, making him an example of the idealized "American Dream."

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ For Ulbrickson, there was one overriding, and dark, fact to be confronted: he had failed again to make good on his public promises. It was very much an open question whether he was going to get another chance.

Related Characters: Al Ulbrickson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 190

Explanation and Analysis

During the annual Hudson Regatta of 1935, Ulbrickson's team of rowers failed to win big. In the varsity race, Ulbrickson's team lost to Cal, disappointing the University of Washington's fans on the West Coast. (However, the fact that Cal won the race reiterated the point that West Coast rowing was noting to be sniffed at, despite the strong East Coast bias associated with the sport in America).

As Brown depicts it, Ulbrickson's defeat made him fear for his job. However, it seems somewhat unlikely that Ulbrickson would have had to face the possibility of being fired: he'd won third place at a national competition, and his sophomore and freshman teams had won their respective races, giving Washington two out of three possible titles—still pretty impressive. Perhaps this is one example of Brown exaggerating a bit to make his story slightly more dramatic than it really was.

Chapter 11 Quotes

❝ For the most part, though, they stayed in Grand Coulee, where they could toss a football around in the sagebrush, chuck rocks off the edges of the cliffs, bask shirtless on stone ledges in the warm morning sun, sit bleary-eyed in the smoke around a campfire at night telling ghost stories as coyotes yelped in the distance, and generally act like the teenagers they actually were—free and easy boys, cut loose in the wide expanse of the western desert.

Related Characters: Johnny White, Chuck Day, Joe Rantz

Related Themes:

Page Number: 205

Explanation and Analysis

The summer after his sophomore year, Joe worked on the Grand Coulee dam, a major engineering project announced by Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Just as Roosevelt predicted, the building of the Coulee damn wouldn't just provide power for the Washington community; it also united many people together in a common cause. That summer, Joe worked alongside two of his teammates from the Washington crew program. Together, they bonded, learned to respect one another, and—perhaps most importantly of all—had a good time. In this poignant passage, Brown describes how Joe and his friends fooled around and had a good time, like the teenagers they were—reminding readers that Joe, in spite of his youth, had never had much time to be a kid.

The passage is important to the book because it shows Joe beginning to bond with his teammates and, at the same time, becoming more of a team player. By learning to trust his friends, Joe learned to row more efficiently and contribute more to his boat's success.

Chapter 12 Quotes

❝ Joe and Joyce took the four children out for ice cream and then stopped by a grocery store and bought some basic provisions before dropping them off back at the house. By the next day, when Joe checked, Harry and Thula had returned. But Joe couldn't fathom what his father and Thula had been thinking. Apparently this had been going on all summer long.

Related Characters: Harry Rantz, Thula LaFollette (Rantz), Joyce Simdars, Joe Rantz

Related Themes:

Page Number: 210

Explanation and Analysis

As Joe worked his way through college, he faced considerable adversity from his own family. Joe had been taking care of himself for many years, but during his junior year, he began to realize that he had to take care of his half-siblings as well. Joe's father, Harry Rantz, and his stepmother, Thula LaFollette, were horrible parents—sometimes, they'd leave their children alone for days at a time, without enough food to go around. Joe and his girlfriend, Joyce Simdars, then took care of Joe's half-siblings whenever they could.

Although Joe was much younger than his father or stepmother, he was a far more responsible person, as this passage clearly shows: he knew how to take care of people in need, whereas his biological father always prioritized his own needs before those of other people. With so many family responsibilities to deal with, Joe's rowing suffered: he couldn't concentrate on winning, and still struggled to work well with his teammates.

❝ Pocock paused and stepped back from the frame of the shell and put his hands on his hips, carefully studying the work he had so far done. He said for him the craft of building a boat was like religion. It wasn't enough to master the technical details of it. You had to give yourself up to it spiritually; you had to surrender yourself absolutely to it. When you were done and walked away from the boat, you had to feel that you had left a piece of yourself behind in it forever, a bit of your heart.

Related Characters: George Yeoman Pocock, Joe Rantz

Related Themes:

Page Number: 215

Explanation and Analysis

In the fall of 1935, George Yeoman Pocock took Joe Rantz under his wing. Pocock, one of the greatest boat builders of his time, was an important adviser to the University of Washington crew team, as well as its resident designer of shells (racing boats). Pocock was also an immensely thoughtful, introspective man, and he took an almost religious view of the sport of rowing. Pocock liked Joe—they both came from working-class backgrounds, and had used their natural talents to rise through society. They'd also had to deal with the same tragedy: the loss of a mother at an early age. Perhaps as a result of this, Pocock felt comfortable opening up to Joe about his philosophy of building a boat: he described the feeling of making a great boat as a kind of spiritual surrender.

The passage is important because it establishes a firm bond between Joe and Pocock. Furthermore, almost everything Pocock says about building shells could be said about the sport of rowing. Good rowers don't succeed simply because of their individual strokes; they succeed because they learn

how to work alongside their peers. In Pocock's language, they "surrender" a part of themselves to the boat itself, and devote themselves to succeeding at all costs. Pocock had a profound impact on Joe's success as a rower—and, given Pocock's insightfulness and his bond of trust with Joe, it's not hard to see why.

It was Brundage himself, however, who came up with perhaps the most twisted bit of logic to advance the antiboycott cause: "The sportsmen of this country will not tolerate the use of clean American sport as a vehicle to transplant Old World hatreds to the United States." The trouble—the "Old World hatreds"—in other words, came not from the Nazis but from the Jews and their allies who dared to speak out against what was happening in Germany.

Related Characters: Avery Brundage (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 226

Explanation and Analysis

As the 1936 Olympic games approached, there was a widespread American movement to boycott the games. Jews, academics, Catholics, and union organizers were particularly active in the boycott; however, their efforts didn't pay off, because the only person who was in a position to make the decision, Avery Brundage, was dead-set on sending American athletes to Germany. Brundage, it's strongly implied, was an anti-Semite himself. His reasons for ignoring the demands to boycott would have been laughable had the situation not been so dire: he claimed that the Jews who wanted to boycott Berlin were just bringing in "Old World hatreds," when, of course, they were reacting to *Hitler's* "Old World" hatred of the Jews.

Avery Brundage may have been a particularly obtuse, stubborn figure in the American establishment, but he wasn't unique. Far too many powerful Americans and Europeans were willing to ignore Hitler's anti-Semitism—had some of them stepped up and opposed Hitler more adamantly, it's entirely possible that Hitler wouldn't have been able to maintain power in Germany, and wouldn't have enacted the policies that resulted in the deaths of six million Jews.

Chapter 14 Quotes

"That was a tough year. I wasn't liked at all," he later said. "I demanded they do better, so I made a lot of enemies." Moch drove those boys like Simon Legree with a whip. He had a deep baritone voice that was surprising in a man so small, and he used it to good effect, bellowing out commands with absolute authority. But he was also canny enough to know when to let up on the crew, when to flatter them, when to implore them, when to joke around with them. Slowly he won his new crewmates over.

Related Characters: Bobby Moch (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 233

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Brown describes Bobby Moch, the superb coxswain for the 1936 American Olympic rowing team. Moch was a small, unimposing figure, but he was also a fast talker and quick thinking—important qualities for any good coxswain. He quickly impressed his teammates, even though they'd been fiercely loyal to his predecessor. Moch knew how to be tough—Brown compares him to Simon Legree, the villainous slave-owner from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—yet he was also fair. As a result, he gained authority over his teammates. During a race, Moch was a master of switching up the team's strategy to confuse his competitors. He could be cautious and tactical in this thinking—as a result, he played just as much of a role in his team's victory as any of the oarsmen.

As they flew down the last few hundred yards, their eight taut bodies rocked back and forth like pendulums, in perfect synchronicity. Their white blades flashed above the water like the wings of seabirds flying in formation. With every perfectly executed stroke, the expanse between them and the now exhausted Cal boys widened. In airplanes circling overhead, press photographers struggled to keep both boats in the frame of a single shot.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 249

Explanation and Analysis

As the University of Washington team drew closer and closer to its Olympic trials, it struggled to get in swing—in other words, to row with perfect synchronicity. However, on the day of its race against Cal, the team got in swing almost without trying. Henceforth, the Washington crew rowed beautifully: it was as if the oarsmen were reading each other's minds, rowing with perfect timing and efficiency.

The passage is one of the book's most eloquent portrayals of the kind of religious experience that George Pocock described in an earlier chapter. A great rower learns how to work alongside his teammates, to the point where he feels a profound, almost spiritual connection with them. In 1936, in the race against Cal, the University of Washington finally grasped such a spiritual connection, and as a result, went on to row to glory in the Berlin Olympics.

Chapter 15 Quotes

❝ Ulbrickson knew full well that money more or less grew on the trees at Yale, and that funds had been vastly easier to come by in 1928, before the Depression, than in 1936.

Related Characters: Al Ulbrickson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 285

Explanation and Analysis

After qualifying for the 1936 Berlin Olympics, the University of Washington rowing team faced a difficult challenge—it had to figure out how to pay its way across the Atlantic. At the time, traveling to Europe from America was no mean feat, especially considering that the country was still in the grips of the Great Depression, meaning that public funds were scarce.

For 21st century readers of *The Boys in the Boat*, it probably seems remarkable that there was a time in recent American history when the country couldn't afford to send its own athletes to the Olympics—and indeed, it's a sign of the ravages of the Great Depression that the University of Washington almost failed to make it to Germany in 1936. However, the Seattle Chamber of Commerce eventually provided the funds for the voyage to Germany, perhaps recognizing that, by sponsoring the crew team, it would bring glory to the city of Seattle and the entire state of Washington.

❝ They were now representatives of something much larger than themselves—a way of life, a shared set of values. Liberty was perhaps the most fundamental of those values. But the things that held them together—trust in one another, mutual respect, humility, fair play, watching out for one another—those were also part of what America meant to all of them.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 289

Explanation and Analysis

As the University of Washington rowing team approached the date of its Olympic competition, the athletes began to realize the gravity of their situation. They'd competed in plenty of important races before, but they'd never thought of themselves as representatives of an entire country. In Germany, especially considering the delicate international political situation at the time, the American team members would be representatives of their country's athletic programs, but also of their country's values. In particular, Brown argues, the boys in the boat felt that their sense of unity and brotherhood—the very quality that made them such good rowers—was a distinctly American feeling. While the reality is that all great rowing teams, American or otherwise, feel the sense of brotherhood and unity that Brown alludes to in this passage, the Washington crew team may have felt that, as Americans, they had a particularly strong bond. Considering that they'd been through the worst of the Great Depression, and had persevered thanks to their optimism and hard work, they may well have been right.

❝ Bobby had been brought up to believe that everyone should be treated according to his actions and his character, not according to stereotypes. It was his father himself who had taught him that. Now it came as a searing revelation that his father had not felt safe enough to live by that same simple proposition, that he had kept his heritage hidden painfully away, a secret to be ashamed of, even in America, even from his own beloved son.

Related Characters: Bobby Moch

Related Themes:

Page Number: 280-290

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of the chapter, Brown explains how Bobby Moch came to learn that his family was Jewish. Moch was looking forward to visiting his relatives in Switzerland; however, he received a letter from his father explaining that these Swiss relatives were Jewish—which made Moch Jewish, too. Moch was devastated: his family had raised him to believe that Americans were defined by their character, not their race or class. Now, however, Moch realized that his parents didn't truly believe in what they'd taught Moch: they were ashamed of their Jewish roots, and knew that they might face discrimination for discussing their Jewishness too openly.

The passage exemplifies the atmosphere of anti-Semitism in America and Europe during the 1930s. Jews were persecuted in many different ways, even in the United States, a country that had always prided itself on its commitment to equality. Around the same time, in Nazi Germany, Hitler was orchestrating a series of policies that would isolate the Jews from the rest of the country and eventually relegate them to death camps. It's important to remember that, although the United States fought against Hitler in World War Two, there was pervasive racism in America too, not just in Fascist Germany.

Chapter 16 Quotes

❝ After the long battle over the boycott issue, Brundage was clearly thrilled to be here. Basking in the applause of his German hosts, he exulted: "No nation since ancient Greece has captured the true Olympic spirit as has Germany."

Related Characters: Avery Brundage

Related Themes:

Page Number: 308

Explanation and Analysis

Upon arriving in Berlin, the American Olympic team, by and large, was bowled over by the scale and magnificence of the Berlin Olympic facilities. Avery Brundage, the president of the American Olympic Committee, declared that Germany had reignited the spirit of the ancient Greeks—the very people who'd first created the Olympics. While Brundage was, in essence, a diplomat (i.e., it was his job to praise whichever country happened to be hosting the Olympics that year), his reaction encapsulated the façade of enlightenment and benevolence that the Nazis used to disguise their genocidal policies. The Nazis recognized early on that hosting the Olympics would trick other countries into thinking of Germany as a peaceful nation, with roots stretching all the way back to the classical era.

Avery Brundage may have been more anti-Semitic than the average visitor to Germany during the Olympics, but his praise for the Nazis better encapsulates the international reaction to the Olympics than any words of condemnation could. By and large, the international community left Berlin impressed with Hitler and his Reich—in part because of the sophistication of German propaganda and in part because they didn't feel a need to look too closely into the Reich's blatant anti-Semitism.

❝ The Americans marched awkwardly on around the track and onto the infield to the strains of the "Deutschlandlied." George Pocock would later say that when they heard the strains of the German anthem they began to march deliberately out of step with the music.

Related Characters: George Yeoman Pocock

Related Themes:

Page Number: 318

Explanation and Analysis

During the Olympic opening ceremony, the Americans marched onto the stage as orchestral music played. However, according to some members of the Olympic team, including George Yeoman Pocock, the Americans didn't simply "play along" with the pomp and formality of the proceedings. Indeed, according to Pocock, many members of the team deliberately marched out of step to the music, thereby signaling their defiance of the Germans.

The passage is important because it suggests that some members of the Olympic team from America had strong reservations (or at least suspicions) about the Nazis. While the truth is that most of the American Olympians who visited Berlin in 1936 were extremely impressed with the Reich, at least a few of them found subtle ways to voice their opposition.

Chapter 17 Quotes

But there was a Germany the boys could not see, a Germany that was hidden from them, either by design or by time. It wasn't just that the signs—"Für Juden verboten," 'Juden sind hier unerwünscht"—had been removed, or that the Gypsies had been rounded up and taken away, or that the vicious *Stürmer* newspaper had been withdrawn from the racks in the tobacco shops in Kopenick. There were larger, darker, more enveloping secrets all around them.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 332

Explanation and Analysis

During their time in Berlin, most of the American Olympians were extremely impressed with the city's beauty and organization. Unbeknownst to them, however, Berlin was hiding some dark secrets: Joseph Goebbels had mandated that the city be redesigned to conceal any evidence of Nazi cruelty. Romani people and other "undesirables" were forced to leave Berlin, and many of them were eventually sent to death camps. Furthermore, journalists were subtly prevented from interviewing local Jewish families, who could have told them about the killing and torture they'd witnessed under the Third Reich. In short, the image of respectability and beauty that the American Olympic team perceived during 1936 was just a façade: the reality was that Germany was already a nightmarish police state. However, because of the ingenuity of Goebbels' propaganda campaign, many of the visitors to the 1936 Olympics had no idea that the Nazis were even at the time planning the expulsion and murder of millions of Jews.

It was the almost perfect inverse of the order he had expected based on the qualifying times. It handicapped the most talented and fastest boats, and gave every advantage to the slower boats. It gave the protected lanes to the host country and her closest ally, the worst lanes to her prospective enemies.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 334

Explanation and Analysis

In the final rowing heat of the 1936 Olympics, America found itself at a huge disadvantage. Even though it had prevailed in the preliminary heat, setting a world record, it was now relegated to the worst lane in the water—the lane farthest from the shore, where the water would be choppier and much more difficult to navigate. Furthermore, Germany and Italy, both in the final heat, had been given the best lanes in the water, those that were closest to shore. Clearly, the German Olympic commission had arranged for its own athletes, and the athletes form Italy, Germany's close ally, to receive preferential treatment. The passage reiterates that the Olympics are, and have always been, an extremely political event. Even the smallest decisions—for example, which lanes to place the athletes in—have important political ramifications.

Chapter 19 Quotes

In the white-hot emotional furnace of those final meters at Grünau, Joe and the boys had finally forged the prize they had sought all season, the prize Joe had sought nearly all his life. Now he felt whole. He was ready to go home.

Related Characters: Joe Rantz

Related Themes:

Page Number: 355

Explanation and Analysis

At the 1936 Berlin Olympics, Joe Rantz and his teammates from the University of Washington won Olympic gold in a climactic race. As the passage suggests, they succeeded not simply because of their athletic prowess, but because they learned to work as a team. In part, the athletes worked so well together because they came from similar backgrounds—any of them were from impoverished West Coast families, and they were familiar with working hard to survive. In any event, the passage sums up the central theme of the book: the importance of teamwork. Joe sat in bed the night after winning his medal, thinking about everything he'd learned. He finally felt "whole," in the sense that he had close friends who trusted and respected him. For someone like Joe, who'd grown up lonely and insecure, this realization was nothing short of an epiphany.

Epilogue Quotes

Roger Morris, the first of Joe's friends on crew, was the last man standing. Roger died on July 22, 2009. At his memorial service, Judy rose and recalled how in their last few years Joe and Roger would often get together—in person or on the phone—and do nothing at all, hardly speaking, just sitting quietly, needing only to be in each other's company.

Related Characters: Judy Rantz, Joe Rantz, Roger Morris

Related Themes:

Page Number: 367

Explanation and Analysis

Many of the rowers on the 1936 American Olympic rowing team remained close friends for their entire lives. Several of them worked together at Boeing for decades, and Joe Rantz and Roger Morris remained close for years, until Joe's death in the 2000s. Although Roger and Joe weren't especially talkative, their relationship ran deeper than mere conversation—as Judy suggested to Brown, they had an intimate, almost spiritual friendship, to the point where they could communicate even in perfect silence.

The passage is a poignant reminder of the importance of trust and teamwork both in rowing and in life. Joe and Roger rowed to Olympic glory because they, and their other teammates, were great friends. Indeed their bond of friendship was so strong that it continued for decades to come.

When Hitler watched Joe and the boys fight their way back from the rear of the field to sweep ahead of Italy and Germany seventy-five years ago, he saw, but did not recognize, heralds of his doom. He could not have known that one day hundreds of thousands of boys just like them, boys who shared their essential natures—decent and unassuming, not privileged or favored by anything in particular, just loyal, committed, and perseverant—would return to Germany dressed in olive drab, hunting him down.

Related Characters: Adolf Hitler

Related Themes:

Page Number: 368

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Brown attempts to bring together the two main plots of his book: the "A plot," in which Joe and his teammates row to glory at the Berlin Olympics, and the "B plot," in which Adolf Hitler and his team of propagandists tried to use the Berlin Olympics to trick the world into thinking Germany was a peaceful nation. As Brown sees it, the "boys in the boat" weren't just rowing for themselves, their college, or even their country. By succeeding at the 1936 Olympics, they dealt a symbolic blow to Adolf Hitler himself: prophesizing the terms under which, nearly a decade later, Hitler would be defeated.

Sports are often intensely political: athletes compete on behalf of their communities and their cultures. But the political stakes of the 1936 Olympics were especially large: on the eve of World War Two, the Washington team proved that Hitler's theories of German superiority were delusional. In short, Brown depicts the "boys in the boat" as unlikely heroes: even if they didn't realize it, they were warriors, fighting on behalf of their country against the evils of totalitarianism and racism.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PROLOGUE

Daniel James Brown says that he began writing *The Boys in the Boat* shortly after learning about his neighbor, a man named Joe Rantz. When Brown met Joe for the first time, Joe was in his mid-seventies, but still in extraordinarily good shape. Brown knew that Joe had been one of the nine young men from Washington state who won a gold medal in the 1936 Berlin Olympics.

When Brown began writing his book, Joe Rantz, the book's protagonist, was still alive. As a result, Brown had the opportunity to interview Rantz for many hours and gain invaluable insight into Rantz's memories of rowing in the 1936 Olympics.

One afternoon, Brown came to visit Joe Rantz, and Joe's daughter Judy answered the door. Joe wasn't doing well; his heart was failing, and he could barely breathe. Nevertheless, he spoke with Brown for a long time, discussing his childhood, his experiences in the Great Depression, and his lifelong love for rowing. When he mentioned "the boat," he began to cry. Later, Brown came to understand that, when Joe spoke of the boat, he meant not only the literal boat in which he and his teammates competed, but also the "shared experience" of rowing with his friends, "bound together forever by pride and respect and love."

One of the key themes of the book is the importance of teamwork and connecting with other people. Rowing is one of the most cooperative sports—the eight oarsmen have to row in perfect or near-perfect unison; therefore, as Joe suggests, a good crew team will feel a sense of total unity.

As Brown prepared to leave, Judy mentioned that her father's medal had disappeared for years—a squirrel had stolen it and placed it in the attic. Brown realized that, like his medal, Joe's story had been hidden for far too long. Inspired, Brown told Joe that he wanted to write about his life, to which Joe replied, "But not just about me. It has to be about the boat."

In writing this book, Brown will not only tell a fascinating story about America and Germany in the 1930s; he'll also shed some light on a neglected hero of American sports. However, the book is about Joe's teammates, and the respect and love that bound them together, not just Joe by himself.

CHAPTER 1

On October 9, 1933, the Seattle skies were gray. Downtown, men sold fruit for a few cents. On Yesler Way, men stood in long lines, waiting for the soup kitchens to open. This was year four of the Great Depression, and a quarter of all working Americans were unemployed. Industrial production had fallen by half, and even the Americans with steady jobs looked to the future with "unrelenting uncertainty." There were some signs of progress—the stock market was climbing again, and there was a new president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. While Roosevelt had inspired many people with his bold rhetoric, others considered him a radical. In the 1933, there was also a new leader in Germany, Adolf Hitler. Hitler, the leader of the National Socialist German Worker's Party, was vocal about his desire to rearm his country, and his party had a reputation for thuggish brutality.

The book opens in the depths of the Great Depression. At the time, there was an overwhelming mood of despair—millions of Americans didn't know what the future held for their communities or their country. However, sports were a way for communities to continue to celebrate themselves and reclaim a sense of optimism. The passage also introduces Adolf Hitler to the story, as Brown adds another narrative to contrast that of the "boys in the boat." Hitler's attempts to score a propaganda victory by hosting the 1936 Berlin Olympics underlies the American crew team's impressive victory there.

On that day in October, it became sunny. At the University of Washington, two students, Roger Morris and Joe Rantz, walked across the quad. Morris and Rantz were both freshmen, but they were tall and powerfully built. They took engineering classes together, but that afternoon, they were headed to a building near the Montlake Cut, the nearby canal. Inside the building, they registered to join the University of Washington freshman crew team.

The passage situates Morris and Rantz in the somber, uncertain atmosphere of the 1930s. For Morris and Rantz, rowing was more than just a fun activity; it was a beacon of hope at a time when the country as a whole didn't have much to look forward to.

Joe Rantz was less confident than Roger Morris, despite his good looks and athleticism. He hailed from a small town in the Olympic Peninsula, and he didn't feel that he fit in at college, where many of the students came from wealthy, big-city families. At the time, the University of Washington didn't offer sports scholarships. However, Rantz's best chance of getting a part-time job on campus—his only means of paying for college—was to join the crew team. But there were only nine seats on the freshman team, making his chances slim.

Many of the boys who rowed for America in 1936 hailed from working-class backgrounds. So Joe Rantz's life story arguably exemplifies the working-class roots of America's Olympic crew team. Joe's experiences with poverty and his outsider status at the University of Washington may have inspired him to succeed as a rower; he had to get on the team to pay his way through college.

For the rest of the afternoon, Rantz, Morris, and the other freshman hopefuls filled out medical forms. Watching Rantz and Morris was the freshman coach, Tom Bolles. Bolles knew that most of the freshmen trying out for the team that day had never rowed before—they were city boys or farm boys who'd spent barely any time in water. Bolles' duty was to teach his freshmen the delicate art of rowing. Al Ulbrickson, the head of the Washington rowing program, was also in the building that afternoon. Ulbrickson came from a family of modest means, and he'd rowed on scholarship during his time as a student at the University of Washington. In 1926, he became the freshman crew coach, and later the head coach. Ulbrickson was famously reluctant to talk to the press, but he was highly respected at the University of Washington. He had a reputation for being strict, and didn't allow students to smoke, curse, or drink.

Many of the coaches who figure prominently in this book came from families of modest means, suggesting that they, no less than their students, were attuned to the harsh economic realities of the Great Depression. Ulbrickson's controversial coaching style reflected some of the nuances in the art of rowing. Rowing requires intense physical exertion, but it also requires intelligence and immense self-control. Therefore, Ulbrickson stressed that his students must demonstrate their intelligence and self-control both in and out of the boat.

Another important person in the room that afternoon was Royal Brougham, the sports editor for the *Post-Intelligencer*. Brougham asked Ulbrickson some questions about the crew program that year, but Ulbrickson, in typical form, offered only brief answers. At the time, college crew was as popular as college football would be at the end of the 20th century; furthermore, a good crew team was a good way for colleges to gain national recognition. However, most of the best American crew programs were located on the East Coast. It was Brougham's goal to use journalism to bring national attention to Washington's West Coast crew program, and in the process, bring attention to the city of Seattle itself.

During the 1930s, there was an intense rivalry between sporting teams from the East and West Coasts, to an even greater degree than exists in the 21st century. Crew—which, at the time, was a hugely popular sport—was more than just an athletic competition; it was a way for different regions of the country to celebrate themselves on a national stage. In a sense, rowers were ambassadors for their communities—so by rowing well against athletes from other areas, they were competing on behalf of their entire communities, not just their teams or their colleges.

That same afternoon, thousands of miles away, a young German architect named Werner March sat in his office in Berlin. March had traveled to the Berlin countryside with Adolf Hitler to survey the old Deutsches Stadion, built for the 1916 Olympic Games. Germany was renovating the old stadium in preparation for the 1936 Olympic games, which would take place in Berlin. Hitler had originally been against hosting the games, since he thought of the Olympics as part of an international Jewish conspiracy and feared that the games would bring Jews and other "vagabond races" to Germany. Joseph Goebbels, the Minister of Propaganda, convinced Hitler to change his mind. Goebbels was a shrewd man, and he recognized that the Olympics would give Hitler an opportunity to portray his country as civilized and peaceful. Hitler agreed with Goebbels—and now, March only had a few more hours to draft his plans for a new, enlarged Olympic stadium.

The "A plot" (i.e., main storyline) of the book is about the crew program at the University of Washington, but the "B plot" (i.e., secondary storyline) is about the Nazi Third Reich in Germany and its attempts to glorify itself via the 1936 Olympic games in Berlin. Goebbels, even more than Hitler, recognized the propagandistic potential of the Olympics. Today, it's often observed that the Olympics are a political tool, by means of which the host country can portray itself in the most positive terms. In 1936, Hitler's Third Reich was "innovative," though, in using the Olympics for its own political ends, conning hundreds of thousands of visitors into thinking of Germany as a peaceful, trustworthy country.

Back in Seattle, Al Ulbrickson thought about the disastrous season Washington had had in 1932. Again and again, teams from California had defeated Washington's best rowers. However, in 1933, Ulbrickson had assembled a great crew team that defeated Yale and many other elite East Coast schools. Therefore, Ulbrickson had a lot of reasons to be optimistic for 1934. He wanted to earn an Olympic gold medal for Washington—something no Washington coach had ever done. Ulbrickson was already thinking ahead to the 1936 games—he'd have to contend with the best rowers from Yale, Harvard, Cal, Oxford, and Cambridge, as well as teams from Italy and Germany.

In part, the University of Washington team succeeded at the Olympic games because it had excellent local competition on the West Coast—above all, Ky Ebright's Cal team. Although Ebright is remembered as one of the finest crew coaches in history, his 1936 team paled in comparison to the Washington team from that year. The East Coast-West Coast rivalry wasn't the only important rivalry in 1930s crew; within the realm of the West Coast, California and Washington had their own fierce competition, too.

CHAPTER 2

Joe Rantz was the second son of Harry Rantz and Nellie Maxwell. Harry was an intelligent man who'd been inspired by the Wright Brothers' experiments with flight, and later built his own an automobile. His wife, Nellie, was a piano teacher and a minister's daughter. They lived in Spokane. Harry kept a busy schedule, running his own automobile repair shop, while Nellie continued teaching piano. But when Joe was still a young child, his mother died of throat cancer. His older brother, Fred, went off to college, and Harry fled to Canada, scarred by his wife's death. Joe contracted scarlet fever and nearly died; afterwards, he was raised by his aunt, Alma.

Joe Rantz's life was marred by tragedy after tragedy; as a result, he grew up without the close familial relationships that many people take for granted. He wasn't close with either his father or his mother, and his early traumatic experiences trained him not to depend too heavily on other people. Of the two people on whom he depended most heavily as a young child, his mother and his father, one died and the other ran out on him.

In 1919, when Joe was only five years old, his older brother Fred arranged for him to come out to Pennsylvania, where Fred was now living and working. Fred had married a woman named Thelma LaFollette. Shortly afterwards, Harry returned from Canada and married Thelma's sister, Thula LaFollette, even though he was seventeen years older than she. Joe returned to live with Harry and Thula; afterwards, Thula and Harry had a child, Harry Junior. When Joe was nine years old, the family's house nearly burned down. Harry risked his life to save Nellie's old piano from the fire. Afterwards, Harry moved his family northeast to a Boulder City mining camp where'd he'd worked as a master mechanic. For many, the mining camp was a dismal place to live, but Joe loved it. Thula, however, despised her new home: she'd been raised to be sensitive and artistic, and she excelled at playing the violin—now she felt ignored, and her hands were too cold to play an instrument.

The passage portrays Harry and Thula as contradictory, volatile people. Harry was sporadically loyal to his child, but he had trouble finding work (as, indeed, millions of people did during the era). The fact that Harry married his daughter-in-law's sister probably proved confusing for the young Joe, and may have further alienated him from his father. Thula seems more concerned with her own artistic ambitions than with taking care of Joe, who isn't her biological son. While it's possible to be sympathetic for Thula's frustrations and anxieties about her future, it's clear enough that Thula did an atrocious job of caring for Joe.

Growing up, Joe developed a passion for gardening. His parents kept a small garden in order to feed themselves cheaply, and Joe was tasked with tending the garden. But Joe and Thula didn't get along—eventually, Thula became so furious with Joe that she told Harry he'd have to choose between his wife and his son. Harry informed Joe, just ten years old at the time, that he wouldn't be living in the house any longer. He arranged for Joe to live with the local schoolteacher, chopping wood to pay his way.

Harry was, to state the obvious, a miserable father—he was more loyal to his young wife than to his own child, and when Thula forced him to choose between the two of them, he chose her. Although Harry didn't abandon Joe altogether—he at least made arrangements for him to earn his food and shelter—he devastated his young son, forcing him to grow up without a strong, loving father figure.

Joe's adolescence was sad and lonely—he had few friends, and he rarely saw his father. But he grew quickly, and enjoyed climbing the mountains near Boulder City in search of food. One day, the schoolteacher (his guardian) showed him how to find edible cauliflower mushrooms growing in the mountains. The knowledge that there was free food hidden in nature excited Joe, and taught him "to recognize a good thing when you saw it."

Joe's childhood was sad, but it also trained him to be strong and take care of himself. He found little pleasures in the midst of his loneliness—for example, finding mushrooms growing on the side of the mountain. Joe grew up resourceful and self-reliant as a result of Harry's callous decision to abandon him.

CHAPTER 3

Rowing is one of the most challenging sports, Brown says, using almost every muscle in the body. The physiological effort of rowing a two thousand meter race is double that of playing a basketball game— furthermore, rowing such a race takes only six minutes. Pound for pound, an Olympic rower takes in as much oxygen as a horse. Rowers often experience serious bone and muscle injuries; thus, one of a rower's most important skills is the ability to endure pain.

Brown emphasizes that rowing is a tremendously challenging sport, not only because of its physical difficulties but because it requires the rowers to maintain great concentration, and to endure a lot of physical discomfort.

In the fall of 1933, Joe Rantz tried out for the crew team. Every afternoon he weighed in, got his assignment for which boat he'd be rowing with, and listen to Bolles lecture the freshmen about the difficulty of rowing. Bolles stressed that rowing was far more physically and intellectually demanding than football—and that most freshmen would probably give up rowing by Christmas.

At the time, rowing was treated as the most prestigious American sport, even more acclaimed than football, baseball, or basketball. As a result, rowing was seen as a test of one's strength, intelligence, and character—as Bolles's speech makes clear, making the crew team was a sign of one's overall worth.

During some of Bolles' lectures, a British man named George Yeoman Pocock would be in attendance. Pocock came from a long line of boatbuilders. The English had essentially founded the sport of rowing (as it was then known) in the 18th century, so that by the late 1700s, rowing had become a popular sport for aristocrats. Pocock's grandfather and father built racing shells (i.e., competitive crew boats), and when George was fifteen, he became his father's apprentice. George was a talented rower, not just a boatbuilder. He developed a new stroke style and used it to win a prestigious rowing competition, the Sportsman Handicap. At twenty, George and his brother Dick immigrated to Canada, where George worked at a shipyard. The job was dangerous, and George lost two fingers there.

George Pocock was another working-class professional who used his immense talents to achieve glory. As the humble apprentice for his father's boatbuilding business, Pocock improved upon his family's long tradition of building excellent shells. Pocock was not afraid to take big risks—for example, traveling to the United States as a young man. Although Pocock ended his life as one of the most respected figures in his field, he knew first-hand what it meant to work hard for little acclaim and to make big sacrifices (for example, losing two fingers!).

In 1912, George and Dick won a valuable commission from the Vancouver Rowing Club to build two sculls (boats). Later, they met Hiram Conibear, the crew coach for the University of Washington—who, in spite of his post, didn't know anything about rowing. Conibear lacked rowing talent, but he made up for his lack of talent with dedication. He studied anatomy to find the best rowing techniques, and he commissioned a dozen shells from the Pocock siblings. George showed Conibear how to coach his students; together, they developed the "Conibear stroke," a much shorter, more efficient stroke than was commonly used. As a result, the University of Washington became a nationally recognized crew school.

Pocock almost single-handedly built the University of Washington crew program into one of the best in the country, if not the world. He used his experience both as a rower and as a builder of aerodynamic shells to reshape the Washington crew team into a force to be reckoned with.

After World War One, Dick and George received hundreds of orders for shells. George Pocock became increasingly devoted to rowing; in particular, he recognized the importance of building a strong "bond of trust and affection" between the rowers in order to ensure that they worked well together.

Because rowing is such an intimate, cooperative sport, it becomes very important for the eight oarsmen to develop a bond of trust and affection—only then can they work together perfectly in the boat.

The freshman team's training proceeded through the fall, with the freshman hopefuls rowing on the water while Al Ulbrickson and Tom Bolles supervised them. Freshmen quickly learned the basics of crew—in particular, the importance of not thrusting the blades of the oars too deep into the water. Roger Morris was one of the most talented freshman rowers, partly because he'd rowed before. Morris hailed from near the Olympic Mountains, and as a younger child, he rowed across the Manzanita Bay.

Some of the freshmen rowers came from backgrounds that afforded them some rowing experience, but most had barely been out on the water at all. Morris, with his experience rowing on the Manzanita Bay, was the exception for the rowing tryouts, not the rule.

The freshmen, Morris included, learned how to execute smooth, powerful strokes, timing their movements perfectly. They rowed for three hours every afternoon, and often came home with blisters and other injuries. Every evening, fewer freshmen showed up to practice. Joe Rantz noted with satisfaction that the rich, polished freshmen didn't last long, because they couldn't deal with the pain of rowing. For Joe, however, "hurting was nothing new."

Brown suggests that Joe succeeded as a rower not in spite of his humble origins but because of them; he'd had so much experience coping with the psychological devastation of abandonment that he knew how to focus on the task at hand and concentrate on succeeding—a skill that helped him enormously on the water.

CHAPTER 4

In November 1924, Thula Rantz was in labor, and Harry, her husband, set off to fetch a doctor. He did, but it took all night, so that by the time Thula had given birth to a daughter, she was "done with the mine" for good. Thula convinced Harry to move to Seattle with Joe and live with her parents. In Seattle, Harry opened a new repair shop, and soon he had enough money to move his family to a new home in Sequim. Harry taught Joe how to repair cars, and he and Thula gave birth to another daughter. Harry sold the apartment, bought land, and built a farmhouse for his family, relying on Joe for help. Joe liked working with his father, and loved having a stable home once again. Joe was also a good, popular student, and he had a steady girlfriend, Joyce Simdars.

Thula continued to dislike her community, and convinced her husband to move to a larger city—where, presumably, she stood a better chance of realizing her ambitions of performing music. Joe seems to have enjoyed his first years in Seattle; however, by this point, one would imagine, Joe had learned not to trust his father—he must have realized that his father had abandoned him before, and could abandon him again.

Thula disliked Sequim, and hated living on a farm. She also resented Joe and disliked his friends. One morning, she accidentally poured hot bacon grease on Harry Junior, burning his chest. He spent weeks in the hospital and had to miss a year of school. Shortly afterwards, the economy began to tank, meaning that Joe's family had to struggle to feed itself. Harry and Thula decided to move out of Sequim with their children, leaving only Joe.

Once again, Thula and Joe decided to abandon Joe, prioritizing their own ambitions above their obligation to take care of Joe. The chapter suggests that Thula in particular was the driving force behind the decision to leave Sequim and abandon Joe yet again—she disliked him, and seems to have despised Sequim, too.

Joe was intimidated by the prospect of living alone, but he told himself that he wouldn't "become a hermit." Instead, he promised himself that he'd survive "on his own." In the weeks following his father and Thula's departure, Joe learned to run the farm. He foraged for mushrooms and fished for salmon with the help of his friend Harry Secor. He also sold moonshine, which he bought from bootleggers (at the time, Prohibition was in effect, and the sale of alcohol was illegal). The entire time, Joe got excellent grades in school. To support himself further, he worked as a logger (i.e., he moved lumber) for his neighbor, Charlie McDonald. He also played the banjo and formed a band to make extra cash.

Joe learned how to cope with adversity—indeed, before he turned eighteen, he'd dealt with more adversity and trauma than many people face in a lifetime. After being abandoned by his father and stepmother, he had no choice but to take care of himself and cope with crippling loneliness. Heroically, Joe found within himself the courage not only to survive but to thrive. At a time when the economy was tanking, he supported himself, and somehow found the time to succeed in school and make music.

Around the same time, Joe's old girlfriend, Joyce Simdars, returned from Montana, where she'd been living. Joyce had been raised in a strict household; her parents, both of whom were Christian Scientists, forced her to work long hours. When Joyce first met Joe Rantz, she was immediately smitten; she loved his easy-going manner, the exact opposite of her parents' personality. She loved that Joe seemed to care for her "just as she was, good or bad."

Joyce Simdars wasn't only Joe's girlfriend for many years; she was his closest friend. Throughout Joe's troubled years with and without Harry by his side, Joyce gave Joe the moral support he needed.

In 1931, Joe got a letter from his brother, Fred, inviting him to live with him in Seattle and attend the prestigious Roosevelt School for his final year before college. Fred hinted that Joe might be able to gain admission to the University of Washington if he did well at Roosevelt. Joe decided to move in with Fred and Thelma. In Seattle, Joe did very well in school, and excelled in gymnastics and singing. Al Ulbrickson got word about Joe's gymnastic talents, and left his card for Joe. Joe graduated from Roosevelt with honors in 1932. His plan was to work for a year, saving money for college. He didn't enjoy living with Fred, who he found controlling and condescending. Nevertheless, he found joy in visiting Joyce Simdars. One afternoon, he presented her with a "golden ring with a small but perfect diamond."

In many ways, Fred was more of a father figure to Joe than Joe's own father (an idea complicated by the uncomfortable family situation of Fred being both Harry's son and brother-in-law). Had Fred not notified Joe about coming to the Roosevelt School, to name only one example, Joe may never have gotten into the University of Washington. At the end of the chapter, Joe seems to propose to Joyce; however, as we soon see, he isn't able to marry her for many years to come, due to his financial limitations.

CHAPTER 5

In the fall of 1933, the weather got colder, making it harder for the freshman crew hopefuls to concentrate on their sport. By October 30, there were only eighty freshmen left trying out for crew, down from the original 175. Tom Bolles decided to move some of the best rowers into small shell barges—he chose both Joe Rantz and Roger Morris for this privilege. The shell barges were broader than competitive shells, making them harder to maneuver. Roger was proud to be chosen for a shell barge—he'd been working long hours playing in a swing band to pay his way through college, and every day he walked two and a half miles to make it to his engineering classes on time.

Weather is a recurring motif in the book; in Seattle, it's often rainy and windy, making it difficult for the crew team to exercise. Here, weather acts as a chance for the freshmen to prove their mettle; only the strongest, most determined freshmen brave the water in October and November, when the temperatures are dropping. Roger is no stranger to adversity, physical or psychological—he walks five miles just to get to and from school—so he continues on with the team.

Roger Morris and Joe Rantz were quickly becoming good friends. Neither one of them was particularly talkative, but they could feel a deep "strand of affection" between them. Joe didn't feel this connection with the other freshmen trying out for crew—in fact, many of his classmates made fun of his old clothes. Nevertheless, Joe worked very hard, studying for class, rowing for three hours a day, and working as a janitor and a musician to support himself. One "silver lining" in Joe's life was Joyce, who enrolled at the University of Washington, too. To support herself, Joyce had to look for help-wanted ads, often traveling across the city in search of work. Eventually, she found work as a maid. On weekends, Joyce and Joe went to movies and attended school dances, which had no cover charges.

As Joe spends more time at the university, he makes some friends with his teammates. However, Joe is a shy, quiet young man, meaning that even his close friends, such as Roger Morris, don't know all that much about his life. Joe continues to love Joyce, who enrolls at the university alongside him; they're both ambitious, intelligent people, who recognize the importance of getting an education, and of finding part-time work to pay for that education. Yet their chief source of joy in life, it would seem, is each other.

Around the same time, in the Dakotas, strong winds tore up the topsoil and scattered it into the skies, blacking out the sun for a few days. This "black blizzard" was the first sign of the Dust Bowl, during which winds blew away much of the topsoil in the American plains, making farming impossible and forcing hundreds of thousands to leave their farms. Also in late 1933, Hitler pulled Germany out of the League of Nations treaty, signifying Germany's bid for power. German manufacturers began producing guns and tanks, and American visitors in Germany who refused to salute Hitler were assaulted by Nazi troops. Despite reports of the brutality of the Nazi regime, American society remained largely ignorant and indifferent to news from Germany; indeed, a poll conducted at the University of Washington that fall found that ninety-nine percent of students opposed America's involvement in an alliance with England against Germany.

The Dust Bowl was one of the defining events of the Great Depression; it devastated American agriculture when American industry was still reeling from the Crash of 1929. As Brown steps back to examine larger historical forces in America, he returns to Germany as well. In spite of the frequent reports of Hitler's brutality as a leader, Americans were largely ignorant or indifferent to his regime. In part, this was because of the legacy of World War One; the carnage of that earlier conflict left few Americans with a strong desire to return to Europe for any military ventures. Another reason why the public remained indifferent to Hitler's rise to power, which Brown doesn't discuss here, is that there was a strong anti-Semitic streak in American life at the time; far too many Americans were willing to look the other way at Hitler's rhetoric.

On November 28, the freshmen had their last practice of the year, meaning that the coaches could now announce who had made "first and second boat." Bolles announced that Roger and Joe had made first boat. Joe forced himself not to show emotion in front of his peers, but later, he wept—"for the first time since his family had left him."

Joe's hard work paid off; he was so experienced with endurance and dedication (having supported himself from an early age, without the help of Harry) that he was able to "play through pain" and impress his coaches.

Early in December, it began to rain heavily in Seattle. The rain was so intense that it eroded houses and cracked roadways. In the midst of the rain, however, Joyce and Joe went home to Sequim. Joyce's mother showed Joe a recent headline from the local newspaper, about how Joe made first crew.

As Joe became more adept at rowing, he became more popular in his community. This should remind readers that, at the time, rowing was a popular, highly acclaimed sport—meaning that the people who excelled at it were seen as heroes.

CHAPTER 6

In January 1934, Joe and Joyce went back to Seattle, where it was still raining. Crew practice began on January 8, and Joe gradually became accustomed to the team's "workout schedule." The team would train for a single race: the Pacific Coast Regatta. Then, if the team did well, it would race against Eastern schools in the national freshman championship. Bolles was an excellent coach; he'd never coached a team that lost a race to California in the Pacific Coast Regatta. The team rowed six days a week, through pouring rain. Meanwhile, Al Ulbrickson worked his upperclassmen hard. However, he quickly became disappointed with his team's performance. One evening, Ulbrickson watched the freshman team row against the varsity team, almost beating them.

Although the team spends long hours training for competition, there are only a small handful of major races that take place during the course of the year, and only one of these takes place on the West Coast. Ulbrickson works his crew hard, reasserting Brown's claim them that rowing is the most difficult sport, since it involves that the athletes be intelligent, quick-thinking, and have enormous powers of concentration in addition to the obvious athletic prowess.

At the University of California, Ky Ebright, the crew coach, was also working with a lackluster varsity team. Ebright was a short, angry man and a great coach, who'd coached an Olympic gold medal team in 1928. Ebright had been a University of Washington coxswain, but later he'd gone to Cal after being passed over for head coach. Ebright quickly built Cal's program into one of America's best. He bought his shells from George Pocock, still regarded as the world's best boatmaker. However, he became suspicious that Pocock had cut a deal with Washington and sold Cal defective boats. Ebright's suspicions concerning Pocock threatened Pocock's business. During the Depression, many crew programs disappeared, making it hard for Pocock to stay in business. Ebright goaded Pocock for charging high prices and for working too closely with the Washington team. Offended by Ebright's accusations, Pocock tried to "smooth things out"; he even began giving rowing advice to Cal coaches. Pocock's behavior further escalated tensions between Cal and Washington.

Ky Ebright is an even more famous crew coach than Al Ulbrickson, even though he's only a supporting character in the book. Ebright was a fierce rival to Ulbrickson, and in many ways, their rivalry made crew on the West Coast much stronger than it would otherwise have been. One of Ebright's most consequential acts as a coach was to goad George Pocock into sharing some of his expert rowing experience with Cal, instead of offering advice exclusively for the University of Washington. The passage conveys the paranoia that dominated the world of college crew in the era before racing shells were mass-produced; one-of-a-kind artisans like George Pocock were so highly sought after that when they worked closely with one crew program, they angered other programs.

By spring of 1934, Bolles had become frustrated with his freshmen—they seemed to be getting slower, not faster. Rowers need to work together, and if one rower's attentions are divided, the entire boat suffers as a result. Bolles wondered if Joe Rantz was the weakest link on the team—he'd rowed in the third seat (usually reserved for technically proficient rowers) and seventh seat (usually reserved for some of the strongest or most attentive rowers) with little success. Joe was powerful, but his form was poor, and he struggled to work with his team. He continued to feel out of place at the University of Washington—his classmates laughed at his clothes and rough manners.

From the beginning, Joe's most conspicuous weakness was his inability to work well with other people. He was clearly a talented athlete, with incredible concentration and a powerful body, but he didn't always get along with his seven fellow oarsmen. As the passage suggests, Joe's weaknesses as a rower reflected his weaknesses in his new environment; because he couldn't feel comfortable in class or on campus, he couldn't succeed in the boat.

By March, the freshman team was doing better. On one occasion, Ulbrickson pitted the freshman, varsity, and junior varsity teams against each other. The freshman team gained a commanding lead, and easily defeated the varsity boat. Bolles realized then that he had "something exceptional." The freshman team was successful that spring for two distinct reasons. Crew teams' speeds are determined by their stroke rate and the power of their strokes; the higher the stroke rate, the lower the power is likely to be. Bolles was impressed with the freshman team's stroke rate *and* power; he also admired the way they worked together and used their heads to row strategically.

Bolles was a good coach because he recognized the importance of cooperation and teamwork; it was not enough for a group of rowers to be good at rowing quickly or efficiently—they also had to excel at rowing in synchronicity with one another, and they had to be able to think together, in the sense of rowing strategically to save energy.

Around the same time, Ky Ebright and his Cal team were preparing to travel up to Washington for the annual race against Bolles' team. Ebright had good reason to feel optimistic about his team's chances; his freshmen were the best he'd ever coached, even better than the freshmen who'd gone on to win Olympic gold in 1932. Knowing that the Cal team was good, Bolles made an effort to make pessimistic statements about his team's chances in the newspapers, so that Cal would underestimate its opponents.

This passage implies that for large, competitive schools, a good coach doesn't just have to train their athletes to win, but must also be skilled at playing political games with other coaches. Here, Bolles and Ebright go through the motions of pretending that their teams are no good in the hopes of lulling their competitors into a false sense of security.

On April 13, the teams from Cal and Washington faced off in Lake Washington. Joyce was watching as Joe prepared to row. Lately, she'd been working as a maid in a judge's house—a job she hated. Joyce, along with tens of thousands of other people, had come out to watch the race, which the people of Seattle regarded as one of the biggest events of the year.

The size of the April 13 race between Cal and Washington testifies to the immense popularity of rowing in the early 20th century—the people of Seattle saw it as their civic duty to come out and support their team.

The freshman teams from Cal and Washington competed first. Cal, rowing with a high stroke rate, got off to an early lead, but Washington brought the race back to a tie by the quarter-mile mark. Slowly, rowing at just thirty strokes per minute, Washington began to overtake Cal at the one-mile mark. By the mile-and-a-half mark, Washington had a decisive lead; it ended up winning by more than four boatlengths, beating the freshman record by twenty seconds. The Seattle crowd cheered. Later, Joe embraced Joyce and danced with her under the Seattle sky.

Washington succeeded in its race against Cal because the rowers knew how to conserve their energy and row efficiently throughout the entire race—rather than simply gaining an early lead and then losing it later on. The Washington rowers shattered the previous record for the course, demonstrating that they were something special—maybe even good enough to make it to the Olympics in 1936.

On the same day, Joseph Goebbels and his wife had a child. Life was good for Goebbels: the Olympic stadium was being torn down and replaced with a larger one. Goebbels had also recently organized a massive book-burning directed at so-called subversive thinkers, including Einstein. He was also investing significant funds in the film industry, recognizing that films could be used to glamorize the Nazi state.

Joseph Goebbels was immoral and devious, but undeniably shrewd; he was hateful enough to order the burning of Einstein's books (because in the anti-Semitic Third Reich, Einstein was seen as a corrupt purveyor of "Jewish science") but savvy enough to recognize that film would be an important weapon for Nazi propaganda.

There was a young woman working in the German film industry, a close friend of Hitler, who would go on to "shape the destiny of the Nazi movement." Her name was Leni Riefenstahl and she had "an indomitable will to succeed." She was a dancer, an actress, and—rare for a woman the time—a director. Her film *The Blue Light* was one of Hitler's favorites; afterwards, he commissioned her to direct *Victory of Faith*, a propaganda film about a Nazi rally. Goebbels became jealous of Riefenstahl's success, but he also admired her films and her beauty. Together, Goebbels and Riefenstahl would play a major role in the way the world viewed the 1936 Olympics.

Riefenstahl is remembered as one of the most talented documentarians of the early 20th century, though the fact that she sold her services to Hitler and the Third Reich has made her immensely controversial in recent years, and raises many debates about the moral duty of artists. Like Goebbels, Riefenstahl understood that film could be used to tell useful lies about the Third Reich, stirring up feelings of patriotism and pride.

CHAPTER 7

Two hours after Joe Rantz and his teammates defeated the Cal freshman team, it was time for the varsity teams to face off. The ensuing race turned out to be one of the most famous in crew history. It began with Washington rowing with a low stroke rate, while Cal rowed with a high stroke rate. As the race neared its end, the Washington team brought its stroke rate up to thirty-eight, and then forty, eventually winning the race by less than a second and setting a record for the course. Washington's victory demonstrated Al Ulbrickson's methodical style of coaching, emphasizing the role of psychology and teamwork.

Washington prevailed against Cal, it's implied, because Ulbrickson was a smarter, more mature coach than Ky Ebright. While Ebright—an impatient, impetuous person in real life—encouraged his crew to gain an early lead, Ulbrickson instructed his students to row gradually, forcefully, and efficiently, slowly and steadily gaining the lead they needed. In short, Ulbrickson and Ebright's teams were reflections of the two coaches' personalities.

In the days following their victory, the Washington freshman team fell into a slump: they got sloppy, and couldn't focus on teamwork. One afternoon, the team rowed so poorly that they grazed the side of an incoming tugboat. Bolles was furious and threatened to kick everyone off the team. In the end, however, the threat turned out to be a bluff: in June, the Washington freshmen traveled to Poughkeepsie, New York to compete in the national championship.

The Washington team's greatest obstacle was itself: as soon as they had some success, they allowed it to distract them from further victory. Bolles was experienced enough to recognize the problem as soon as he saw it; therefore, he insisted that his students remain focused on their upcoming competitions, instead of allowing their victory to make them cocky.

To get to Poughkeepsie, Joe traveled in a luxurious Pullman railway car—courtesy of the university. He played the guitar for his teammates, which made them laugh and make fun of Joe. Joe was hurt—music had been an important part of his life, especially during his lonely days taking care of himself.

Joe succeeded at rowing, but he allowed his insecurities about his past (and the unjustifiable bullying of his teammates) to get to his head. In spite of all his experience taking care of himself, Joe remained strikingly vulnerable.

In Poughkeepsie, the Washington team practiced on the unusual Hudson River course. They rowed poorly, frustrating Bolles—it seemed that the wind and river currents were interfering with the team's performance. Bolles realized that he would need to talk to Pocock about what to do. That night, the team slept in uncomfortable, hot cots.

The Washington team continued to row erratically and inconsistently—they seemingly couldn't maintain the concentration necessary for consistent success.

The Poughkeepsie Regatta was an American tradition, stretching all the way back to 1824, when American rowers faced off against a team of British sailors, cheered on by fifty thousand fans. As the 19th century went on, regattas became more and more popular in America, causing an explosion of interest in rowing. Other elite colleges founded crew programs. By the early 20th century, rowing clubs were a staple of wealthy Americans' lives. Until the mid-1920s, no West Coast school could compete with East Coast rowing; however, this began to change in 1923, under the leadership of Washington's crew coach, Russell Callow, who led Washington to its first victory at Poughkeepsie, effectively making Washington the national champion. Callow's team succeeded not only because of its talents but because Callow had arranged for George Pocock to design the team's shells.

Rowing was more than just a popular sport; it was a reflection of the state of American culture in the early 20th century. At the time, East Coast culture and values dominated the country to a more pronounced degree than now; elite East Coast colleges produced the most powerful people in American society, with little competition from West Coast institutions. In a way, then, the rise of West Coast rowing around the time of Callow's 1923 victory reflected major changes in the United States, as the West Coast's culture, values, and economy began to give the East Coast a run for its money.

The clash between West and East Coast crew teams delighted reporters, since it made for a good story. Reporters played up the West Coast teams' wild, rough, brawny qualities, while emphasizing their East Coast counterparts' intelligence, sophistication, and refinement. Joe and his teammates fit snugly into the traditional east-west narrative: "old money versus no money at all."

In part, the West-East rivalry in rowing reflected real cultural differences, but in part it reflected sports journalists' desire to create a good story that would get people talking.

On June 16, the teams prepared for their race. Poughkeepsie was brimming with crew fans, eagerly awaiting the competition. The freshman teams were first. Joe and his teammates were most intimidated by the Syracuse team, which had won three of the last four freshman titles. Syracuse took an early lead in the race, followed closely by Washington. Then, gradually, Washington crept into the lead. One of the Syracuse rowers fell off-rhythm, and the team never recovered—Washington beat Syracuse, the nearest team, by five boatlengths. The Washington team's victory stunned sports fans across the country: Washington had rowed steadily from start to finish, barely breaking its rhythm. After the freshman race and the junior varsity race came the varsity race. Quickly, the race boiled down to a competition between Cal and Washington. The two West Coast teams alternated between first and second several times. Then, in the last quarter-mile, Cal pulled ahead, winning by less than a boatlength.

Washington's victory against the larger, better-established East Coast crew teams was significant, both because it emphasized the growing clout of West Coast rowing and West Coast cultural influence in general, and because it proved that Ulbrickson had found a strikingly new way to coach crew: Ulbrickson emphasized consistency, and a slow, steady approach to the sport. While Washington lost its most prestigious race at the Hudson Regatta, it nonetheless made a name for itself by dominating the freshman competition (and the fact that Cal and Washington dominated the varsity race further proved the strength of West Coast rowing).

As the Washington team traveled back to the West Coast, America was beginning to "dry up and blow away." The summer of 1934 was very hot, worsening topsoil erosion in the Midwest. Farmers abandoned their property and drove westward. Furthermore, when Joe got back to Seattle, he found that there was now a major union strike underway. On July 18, members of the International Longshoreman's Association prevented ships from unloading cargo, in spite of the Seattle police force's aggression. Around this time, Franklin Roosevelt was under fire for not doing enough to fight the Depression. Others criticized him for his Communist tendencies.

While Joe and his peers were busy perfecting their rowing, the country was going through some major changes. As a sign of popular unrest and economic depression, tens of thousands of union workers went on strike in the city of Seattle. There was a general feeling of frustration—Roosevelt had campaigned on the promise that he would fight the Great Depression, but some people faulted him for not doing enough, while others criticized him for being too radical in his approach.

In August of 1934, Franklin Roosevelt traveled to the tiny Washington town of Ephrata to announce the building of the Grand Coulee Dam, which could generate millions of dollars of cheap electrical power for the western United States, and provide tens of thousands of people with jobs. His speech galvanized all who heard it; it reminded the working-class people of the Pacific Northwest that they could improve their lives by "pitching in and pulling together."

Roosevelt was one of the most effective orators of his era; here, he showcased his talents for delivering inspiring yet level-headed rhetoric that promised concrete solutions to peoples' problems. Roosevelt's speech emphasized the value of cooperation—an important value, both for Americans in general and rowers in particular.

CHAPTER 8

One night, Joe was fishing near the Dungeness River, when a game warden hit him over the head with a piece of driftwood. Joe's old friend, Harry Secor, chased after the warden, but the warden got away. The "jig was up"—Joe and his partner would never again break the law by fishing for salmon.

Throughout his time as a rower at Washington, Joe continued to want for food and money, reflecting the economic challenges the entire country was experiencing at the time.

Joe spent the summer of 1934 living in Sequim, trying to raise enough money to support himself for another year. He cut hay and dug ditches, often working alongside Charlie McDonald, his neighbor. McDonald taught Joe how to split logs; he also taught him about the subtleties of wood grain. Joe found that he enjoyed working with wood, especially the "sensuous nature of the work." He found a connection between rowing and wood-splitting—"something about the delicate application of strength."

Joe works hard to support himself and ensure that he'll be able to continue on at the University of Washington. The passage further suggests that Joe is a sensitive, thoughtful young man, in addition to being a superb rower. The combination of delicacy and strength is critical in rowing—a good rower like Joe knows how to combine power with impeccable technique.

When Joe and his classmates returned for training in the fall, they were excited about their prospects. Newspapers suggested that Joe and the other freshmen were talented enough to qualify for the Olympics in 1936, and although coaches tried to prevent the team from reading such reports, Joe and his friends had heard about them. Al Ulbrickson was so excited about his team that he considered making them varsity immediately. However, Ulbrickson also realized that his team was "green"—talented but relatively new to the subtleties of the sport. He was also concerned that some of the rowers, especially Joe, didn't have the concentration for competitive rowing. He decided to train his sophomores by "knocking them down a peg"—disguising his excitement about their abilities.

Ulbrickson wanted to make his sophomores varsity as soon as possible, but he realized that if he did so, he'd run the risk of making them cocky and headstrong. Instead, Ulbrickson decided to treat his sophomores more disdainfully. In doing so, Ulbrickson implicitly trained them to row under even the most adverse circumstances—without his support, the team learned to focus on their races, not the "hype."

In the fall, Joe and his sophomore teammates rowed fifth boat, the lowest rung on the ladder. They were confused, and Joe in particular struggled to remain optimistic. He had even less money than he'd had last year, and he could no longer afford to go on as many dates with Joyce. Joyce continued to wear her diamond ring, but Joe wasn't sure he could "live up to its implications." Around the same time, Joe found out from Fred that Harry, Thula, and his half siblings were living in Seattle. Harry had moved his family to a home near the waterfront; later, as his marriage to Thula grew increasingly unhappy, he'd found work as a mechanic at a bakery.

Joe had plenty of experience with surviving under adverse conditions, but he was also surprisingly fragile and vulnerable. Therefore, Ulbrickson's calculated disdain made him more insecure, at least at first. Another reason for Joe's poor performance during this time was the instability in his personal life—Harry was back, and Joe didn't know how to behave around his father, or if he should reach out to his father at all.

In the fall of 1934, Joe tried to reunite with Harry, Thula, and his half siblings. When he and Joyce went to Harry's house, Thula answered the door and refused to let them inside. She told Joe that Harry wasn't home, and that he shouldn't come to visit again. Then she shut the door in his face. Joyce was heartbroken; she asked Joe why he wasn't angrier about Thula's cruelty. Joe replied, "It takes energy to get angry … I have to stay focused."

This is one of the most heartrending scenes in the book: Thula is a selfish, close-minded woman who seems not to recognize how hurtful she's being toward her stepson. But although Thula is the more overtly "villainous" of the two, Harry is perhaps worse; he allows his wife to convince him to abandon his own child, time and time again.

That fall, Joe threw himself into rowing. He idolized George Pocock, a man who, despite having little in the way of a formal education, had educated himself in virtually every subject. Pocock treated boatmaking as an art form. One of his most important contributions to the art was to replace Spanish cedar, the typical material for boats, with American cedar, readily available in Vancouver. Pocock used American cedar to build smoother, more aerodynamic boats. In October, Ky Ebright wrote Pocock to order new shells for Cal; in his letter, he accused Pocock of sending him poor shells to sabotage his program. Nevertheless, Ebright ordered more shells from Pocock, and Pocock sent them down to California.

Joe and Pocock came from similar backgrounds—they used their talent and initiative to climb the ladder of success. The rivalry between Cal and Washington persisted, but the rivalry arguably made West Coast rowing stronger overall, just as it had in the past. Cal received better rowing shells, and its rowing program seems to have improved considerably.

In the middle of October, a storm hit Seattle. As a result, Ulbrickson had no choice but to keep his team from training on the water—the storm was so intense that it could have destroyed the shells. Around the same time, Leni Riefenstahl was working on her new film, *Triumph of the Will*. Joseph Goebbels continued to envy Riefenstahl's friendship with Hitler, and Riefenstahl later claimed that he tried to sabotage her. Nevertheless, *Triumph of the Will* became a success in Germany when it was released in 1934; it's still remembered as one of the most effective propaganda films ever made. Hitler was so pleased with the film that he commissioned another from Riefenstahl for 1936.

Triumph of the Will *is considered one of the most controversial works of Western cinema: Riefenstahl's cinematic prowess is unquestionable, but the fact that she would put her talents to work for a vile dictator like Adolf Hitler is despicable. Riefenstahl glorified not only Hitler and his government, but also the Fascist ideals that Hitler preached—in particular, the superiority of "Aryans" to all other races, a belief that would later motivate Hitler to order the murder of millions.*

As 1934 came to an end, Joe headed back to Seattle to spend the holidays with Joyce and her family. Around this time, he read an article about how students at the University of Washington were badly in debt for their tuition, even while many other students had relatives who could pay their tuition easily. After reading the article, Joe felt a mixture of anxiety, self-doubt, and envy for his wealthy classmates.

Joe is a complicated character: on one hand, his insecurities about his background and income motivate him to succeed, but on the other, his insecurities often hold him back from greatness.

CHAPTER 9

It was January 14, 1935, and the Washington crew team sat on the benches, waiting for Al Ulbrickson to make his announcements concerning the upcoming rowing season. Ulbrickson began by saying that the team would focus on getting into peak physical condition, rather than technique. He added that his goal was to send Washington athletes to the Olympic games in 1936. He insisted that some of his team would end up on the podium in Berlin—a statement that made the team cheer. After Ulbrickson's speech, rivalries broke out on the team. Nobody was sure who Ulbrickson was talking about when he'd brought up Berlin, but everyone secretly hoped he'd been talking about them. The nine sophomores believed that Ulbrickson had been referring to them; however, Ulbrickson also seemed interested in sending a varsity rower named Broussais C. Beck Junior to Berlin. Joe noticed that Beck was a wealthy, spoiled student.

Ulbrickson had carefully refrained from showering the sophomore team with praise for fear that the team would become overly cocky and lazy. Now, he praises the entire Washington crew team, thereby encouraging the sophomores to compete with their peers for Olympic glory. In other words, Ulbrickson deliberately fostered a rivalry within his team, recognizing that such a rivalry would probably made his rowers stronger. In part, the rivalry that broke out on the team was a class-based rivalry: Joe in particular resented the fact that his wealthier peers were being considered for the same place on the Olympic rowing team.

Tom Bolles, in charge of the new freshman crew, realized that he might be able to assemble an even better team than the one he'd assembled last year. But during this time there was a flu outbreak on campus, and many students were sick. Meanwhile, the newspaper published a story about the sophomores' Olympic chances, outraging the varsity team. Bobby Moch, the coxswain of the JV team, took advantage of the fact that Bob Green, a sophomore rower, liked to shout while he rowed. While Bob shouted, Moch would whisper to his own rowers to take twenty big strokes "after five more" (i.e., wait five strokes and then take the twenty big strokes). Then, when Green fell silent, Moch would turn to the sophomores and yell, "Green just opened his big mouth again. Let's pass them"—by which point his boat would already be accelerating forward, "as if by magic." Moch's tactic always made the sophomore rowers lose their cool—especially Joe. Ulbrickson began to doubt his sophomores' abilities—he'd expected them to emerge as the new varsity lineup, but now they couldn't even beat the JV team.

The rivalry within the Washington rowing team was intended to make the rowers stronger in the end; however, this passage suggests that it had the opposite effect. Instead of strengthening the rowers, the rivalry made them increasingly insecure; for example, Bobby Moch's teasing trickery caused Bob Green and his sophomore peers to question their own abilities. Moch's performance reminds readers that although the coxswain isn't an oarsman, he plays a crucial role in his boat, determining the strategy that will or won't bring the team to victory.

On afternoon, Ulbrickson summoned his sophomores into his office and told them that they weren't trying hard enough: they were sloppy and lazy. The talk was devastating for Joe, as well as Roger Morris and Shorty Hunt, Joe's two closest friends. Shorty Hunt went on to become one of the best rowers in Washington history. He was also a good student, a handsome man, and a member of student government; however, he was thin-skinned, and couldn't deal with teammates' taunts. Like Shorty, Joe felt intense self-doubt after meeting with Ulbrickson.

So far, the book has offered relatively little information about the other rowers on the Washington team; here, however, readers begin to learn that there were many others who hailed from a background similar to Joe Rantz's own. Like Joe, the other sophomore rowers struggled with insecurity and self-doubt; before they made it to the Olympics, they had to learn how to control their own minds.

In the weeks following Ulbrickson's meeting, the sophomores began performing better. But they had bad days, too, during which they seemed incapable of cooperating. Nevertheless, Ulbrickson began listing the sophomores as the varsity team. Thinking ahead to Berlin, Ulbrickson wondered if he'd be able to use any of the freshmen in two years. In particular, he wondered about Don Hume, a talented freshman who rowed very consistently. Ulbrickson also liked the JV rower Jim McMillin, a powerful athlete. As March approached, Ulbrickson began mixing athletes from different boats. He came to realize the team's problem: there were too many talented *individuals*, and not enough team players.

Ulbrickson began to experiment with different strategies and combinations of rowers—a period that proved invaluable in assembling the future Olympic team. Ulbrickson's key insight was that rowing was a team sport, not a sport for talented individuals. Training an Olympic team wasn't just a matter of teaching his students how to row quickly and efficiently; rather, winning a gold medal would require the teammates to learn how to work together.

In April, the weather became sunny again, and Joe and Joyce rented a canoe. On the water, they talked about getting married one day soon, and Joe sang and played the guitar for Joyce. The next day, Joe traveled out to visit his father. Harry hadn't seen Joe in almost six years, and he seemed nervous about having to talk with his son. Joe asked about his half-siblings, and Harry seemed relieved not to have to talk about the day he abandoned Joe in Sequim.

One reason that Joe struggled with insecurity even after learning to take care of himself from an early age was that Harry, his father, kept coming back into his life—and then leaving abruptly. Harry, it seems pretty clear, was a weak, cowardly man, who never knew how to be a good parent, and preferred to run away from his problems.

One of the most important concepts in rowing, Brown says, is the concept of "**swing**." Swing is a moment in which all eight oarsmen are rowing in perfect unison, so that the boat moves fluidly and gracefully. The advantage of swing is that it allows the oarsmen to row very efficiently for long periods of time. Ulbrickson knew that Joe and his teammates had found their swing the day they won at Poughkeepsie; he was determined to help them find it again. He officially declared the sophomores to be the varsity crew; however, he was frustrated that the sophomores couldn't always find their swing. After beating the sophomores in a race, the JV team petitioned Ulbrickson to be named the varsity team; Ulbrickson reluctantly declared that whoever rowed faster at Oakland would row at the Pacific Coast Regatta. Meanwhile, Ky Ebright was having a hard time managing his team. The same rowers who had been the best in the country were now incapable of beating sophomores from Washington.

Swing is the perfect metaphor for the teamwork and cooperation that eventually lead Joe and his peers to Olympic glory: the only way for rowers "get in swing" is to learn to cooperate with one another both on and off the water. For the time being, Joe and his peers hadn't developed their special bond of friendship; as a result, they could only rarely get in swing with each other. Ulbrickson, to his credit, recognized the importance of swing, and devoted a lot of time to perfecting swing. Ulbrickson also had the unenviable task of managing his team's rivalries—the very rivalries that he'd helped to create by announcing that Washington would be going to the Olympics in 1936.

On April 7, the Washington team was in California, preparing for their time trial. Ebright and Ulbrickson spoke to reporters, doing their best to sound pessimistic about their teams' chances. On April 10, the JV Washington team defeated the sophomores by a boatlength. Nevertheless, after the sophomores raced again—this time using the shell they'd used to win at Poughkeepsie last year—Ulbrickson decided to race the sophomores, despite what he'd promised.

Ulbrickson committed a major mistake as a coach—he broke his promise to his JV students, making himself seem temperamental and unreliable. A good coach must also be a good leader, and Ulbrickson may have severely challenged his students' trust and respect for him when he broke his promise.

On April 13, the Washington sophomores prepared to race Cal. First up were the Washington freshmen, however: they easily defeated the California team. Next were the JV rowers. Still angry about being demoted, the team pulled ahead of Cal halfway through the race and then began raising their stroke rate, as if "unleashing months' worth of frustration." The team went on to beat Cal by eight boatlengths.

The passage is a great example of how rivalry and frustration can be powerful motivators in a race: the JV team triumphed, it's implied, because they were so furious at Ulbrickson and the sophomores for booting them out of the top spot.

Finally, it was time for the varsity teams to race. Joe and the other rowers knew they had a lot to prove. The race kicked off with Washington in the lead; then, Cal jumped ahead by less than a boatlength. As the teams approached the halfway mark, Cal increased its lead. Cal increased its stroke rate, but George Morry, coxswain for the sophomores, remembered what Ulbrickson had told him—resist the temptation to increase the stroke rate. Gradually, the Washington team climbed back to tie Cal. As the teams rowed to the finish, it was too close to call. A referee shouted that Washington had won; the others that Cal had won. The radio broadcaster announced, California wins." Then, suddenly, he announced that Washington had won by six feet—this was the official result.

The Washington team triumphed against Cal, it's strongly implied, because the athletes had something to prove. Sports rivalries, especially rivalries within *a time, can be powerful motivators: in this case, the sophomores' rivalry with the JV team almost forced both boat to try their hardest against Cal—had either boat failed to win that day, they would have given their rivals something to laugh about, and called their status as future Olympians into question.*

The sophomores had rowed to great success: they'd proved that Ulbrickson was right to promote them to varsity. Back in Seattle, they were greeted as heroes—they were summoned to the mayor's office and given awards for bringing honor to their state. This was one of the happiest moments of Joe's life—he'd never dreamed he'd be so honored for his achievements.

Joe became increasingly popular and famous as a result of his college rowing successes. Especially for a working-class man who spent a large chunk of his early life working hard to support himself, meeting the mayor must have felt like an incredible achievement.

CHAPTER 10

In spite of its promising crew program, Seattle was still considered "a backwater in many regards, and not least in the world of sports." The baseball and football teams rarely if ever played on the national stage, meaning that national or international titles in crew would be a feather in Seattle's cap. In many ways, Joe and his peers were putting Seattle on the map.

As a consequence of the popularity of rowing, Joe and his teammates at the University of Washington had an opportunity to bring tremendous glory not only to themselves and their college but to their city and their state.

By April of 1935, the Dust Bowl had wreaked havoc on the Midwest, meaning that migrant workers were coming out to California and Seattle. Also in April, news of Hitler's brutality reached American newspapers. And yet the vast majority of Americans ignored the dark news from Europe.

The passage contrasts the cautious optimism of Joe and his teammates with the overall mood of despair in America at the time. People looked across the country and saw only ruin—and many of them were too frightened to look across the Atlantic to Hitler's nightmarish police state.

Ulbrickson prepared for Poughkeepsie. He announced that the sophomores wouldn't necessarily be competing there—they would have to earn their varsity spots. This announcement made Joe and the other sophomores train even harder. Ulbrickson raced the varsity and JV teams against one another; often, the JV team won.

The JV and varsity teams continued to compete fiercely—forcing both teams to try as hard as they could. Ulbrickson seems to have fostered a rivalry between his athletes in order to ensure that both boats would be at the top of their game for Poughkeepsie.

One of the most challenging aspects of rowing is that the faster the crew rows, the harder it is to maneuver the boat. A high stroke rate usually results in sloppier technique. Partly for this reason, great oarsmen need to be "immune to frustration." They must also understand how to work together, tailoring their own strokes to fit in with the group pace. The best teams are often the most diverse—on the other hand, if the oarsmen are all light and introverted or big and aggressive, then the team will be at a serious disadvantage.

One could say that rowing—as with so many other sports—is a metaphor for life. The best boat, much like the best group of people, is diverse, so that different athletes' strengths and weaknesses complement each other. Perhaps the one underlying quality that all good oarsmen must have in common, however, is concentration: they need to know how to block out fought that isn't *about winning the race.*

After many weeks of training, Ulbrickson announced that the JV team would return to its varsity status, and the sophomores would row JV. His announcement angered many sports reporters, who'd been supporting the sophomores for months. The train ride out to Poughkeepsie was uneasy—there was still a hot rivalry between varsity and JV. In Poughkeepsie, the other coaches couldn't believe that Ulbrickson had demoted the sophomores to JV. On the other hand, Ulbrickson, feeling paranoid, wondered if Ebright had forced his team to lose to Washington early that year to lull Ulbrickson into a false sense of security. Ulbrickson rowed the JV and varsity teams against each other, and the sophomores lost by a humiliating eight boatlengths.

Ulbrickson was still such a respected figure at the University of Washington that the athletes instinctively trusted that he would make the "right" decision about his boats. However, the passage makes it clear that Ulbrickson himself wasn't sure what to do—he wondered if Ebright was conning him, and he wondered if his sophomores really had what it took to win at Poughkeepsie, not to mention the Olympics.

On the morning of the regatta, some thirty thousand people showed up—less than had been expected, probably due to the heavy rain. The first race of the day was the freshman race, and the Washington team defeated Cal by four lengths, for an even faster time than the freshman team last year had posted. Next was the JV race. Joe and his peers were feeling insecure—they'd been humiliated by their own teammates time and time again. They started off in fourth place, but gradually surged into the lead. By halfway through the race, the sophomores were rowing beautifully—they went on to win the race easily. Ulbrickson realized that he could win all three races at Poughkeepsie—something no coach had ever done.

Joe and his peers succeeded at Poughkeepsie because they had something to prove. While they were certainly weakened by insecurity due to Ulbrickson's volatility and their competitions with the varsity team, the sophomores learned from their mistakes, and managed to win seemingly without any trouble.

The final race of the day, the varsity race, began at six pm. As the race kicked off, Washington gained a narrow lead. Gradually, however, Cal and Cornell were catching up. By the halfway mark, Washington was still ahead, but not by much. In the final mile, Cal pulled ahead, and Washington fell behind by almost a boatlength. Then, Cornell pulled ahead of Washington, pushing Washington into third place. In the end, Cal won the race in record time. Ulbrickson was humiliated: he'd failed to win a national title, and the newspapers would continue to lambast him for switching the sophomores into JV (even though, Ulbrickson insisted, the sophomores wouldn't have won in the varsity division). In the next few weeks, rumors circulated that Ulbrickson was going to be fired, and Tom Bolles was going to get Ulbrickson's job.

Ulbrickson embarrassed himself, the passage claims, by switching the sophomores into JV (even though, one might think, winning two out of three national titles is still pretty impressive). The passage reminds readers that a coach's job isn't simply to win titles; ultimately, his job is to preserve his own *job and keep himself from getting fired and replaced with someone else. The chapter ends on a note of suspense—after the regatta, it seemed possible that Ulbrickson would be kicked off the team.*

CHAPTER 11

In the summer of 1935, Joe said goodbye to Joyce and drove out east, looking for work. He found a job in the town of Grand Coulee, where workers were building a massive dam; he took on more dangerous work than most people accepted, so that he could earn more money. Joe's duties included drilling holes in the sides of cliffs to make room for dynamite. During his work, he thought about the prospect of rowing in the Olympics, but he also felt insecure about having been demoted to JV.

It's a mark of the times that Joe must continue working hard to support himself through college, even after he garners so much acclaim for his crew victories—at the time, sports scholarships were a rarity, at least at the University of Washington. On top of his financial obligations, Joe continues to contend with his own self-doubt.

Around the same time, Ulbrickson agreed to race his varsity team against teams from Cal, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, UCLA, and Syracuse. Ulbrickson wanted to disprove the often-repeated claim that Cal would be representing America in the 1936 Olympics. In the race, Cal and Washington led the field, but Cal ended up winning by less than half a second.

During the next few chapters, Washington's status as a natural for the 1936 Olympics begins to slip, as Joe and his peers begin to show signs of weaknesses and insecurity on and off the water—here, for example, the boys in the boat lose to Cal.

That summer, Joe learned to use a jackhammer to drill into rock. The work was difficult, but Joe got along well with his coworkers. He also enjoyed the fresh air and the physical challenge of working a jackhammer. At night, he played the banjo and wrote letters to Joyce. Eventually, he discovered that two of his teammates were also working at Grand Coulee that summer: Johnny White, from the freshman team, and Chuck Day, from varsity. Johnny was a likeable man, and came from a poor family. His father's business had crashed after 1929; afterwards, he'd encouraged his son to row competitively. Although Johnny had graduated high school two years early, he spent two years working before enrolling in college, both to make money and to build up his muscles. Chuck Day was a talented rower, though he and Joe hadn't spoken much, since Chuck rowed varsity. Chuck's family wasn't nearly as poor as Joe's or Johnny's, but he loved the challenge of working on a dam—he was a "ferocious competitor."

Over the summer, Joe began to realize that he and his teammates weren't so different—they all hailed from working-class backgrounds and needed to work hard to pay their ways through college. Instead of feeling embarrassed and insecure about their financial situations, however, Joe and his buddies bonded with one another and had a great time working together over the summer. This was an important formative experience for Joe—previously, the book has given the impression that Joe was a lonely outsider at Washington. But over the summer, Joe came to understand that he and his teammates were on a more equal footing and, therefore, that he could trust them and cooperate with them in a race.

Over the course of the summer, Joe, Johnny, and Chuck became close. The work was crushingly hard, but they found cheap ways to have fun—there were bars that played jazz and country music, card houses, and restaurants. Joe, Johnny, and Chuck all occasionally broke their promise to Al Ulbrickson to remain sober, but Joe—unlike Johnny and Chuck—didn't want to pay extra money to go dancing, especially since he was still with Joyce. In spite of the hard work that summer, Joe, Johnny, and Chuck found plenty of time to "act like the teenagers they actually were."

That summer, Joe, Johnny, and Chuck worked hard, but they also found some time to have fun. In doing so, they cemented their friendship, and may have inadvertently made themselves better rowers: by developing a close friendship, they probably learned to work "in swing" more easily, a skill that helped them to Olympic gold in 1936.

CHAPTER 12

In the summer of 1935, thousands of young German men were working on the enormous Olympic stadium in Berlin. Nearby, other workers were building a huge limestone bell tower. Ten years later, in the twilight of the Third Reich, some of the same Germans who'd joined the Hitler Youth in the 1930s would sit in the tower, shooting at invading Russian soldiers—and would later be lined up against a wall and shot.

It's been a few chapters since the book has discussed the state of affairs in Germany; here, Brown reminds readers of the ultimate fate of Hitler's Third Reich—a decade after Hitler boasted of a thousand-year Reich, his country lay in ruins, and he shot himself in a bunker underneath Berlin.

To the south of Berlin, Germans were building facilities for the rowing competitions. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there had been many rowing clubs in Germany, some of which were exclusively Jewish, and some of which allowed both men and women—but under Hitler, such clubs had been banned. In 1935, workers built a grandstand from which the most powerful men in Germany could watch the Olympic rowing competition.

In the 1930s, Germany was still trying to pass itself off to the international community as a powerful yet benevolent and "civilized" nation; as a result, it took great pains to make its Olympic facilities cutting-edge. At the same time, however, German society was becoming terrifyingly repressive, especially for Jews.

Joe returned to Seattle in September of 1935; he'd earned enough money to support himself through the school year. Meanwhile, Joyce had quit her job as a judge's maid after the judge made sexual advances. She was now working for another family, though the family was asking her to cook for them—a task she knew nothing about. Joe and Joyce also learned that Harry and Thula had taken to leaving their children at home for days without enough food. Thula had been going on long trips to audition with the great violinist Fritz Kreisler; Kreisler had called her, "the greatest female violinist I have heard." Now, Thula was performing on Seattle radio; with her new celebrity, she was intent on "getting out of the house."

Thula's career was on the rise, but she continued to be a lackluster parent, abandoning her biological children for days at a time to pursue her own dreams. Furthermore, Harry went along with Thula's bizarre behavior, rather than encouraging her to be a better parent (or spending time with his own children).

Back in school, Joe continued rowing. Al Ulbrickson had not been fired, contrary to what many had guessed, but he now had something to prove—he had to get his team to the Olympics. To do so, he needed to make better use of his ally, George Pocock. He and his wife often dined with Pocock and Pocock's wife. One evening, Ulbrickson asked Pocock to keep an eye on Joe—Ulbrickson needed to decide whether Joe was Olympic material. Soon after, Pocock invited Joe to survey his workshop. He showed Joe his tools, and explained some of the techniques he used to build shells. Joe was fascinated; he'd always been interested in woodworking, and he respected Pocock's sophistication. Pocock told Joe that building a boat wasn't just a technical process; it was also a religious experience—much like rowing. Confused but impressed, Joe nodded and left the shop.

Ulbrickson had a personal stake in sending a team to the Olympics: he needed to reconfirm his status as a great coach for the University of Washington. Ulbrickson demonstrated his talents by using all the resources at his disposal—not least of which was George Pocock. Pocock sized up Joe, and Joe seems to have had enormous respect for Pocock. In particular, Joe identified with Pocock's characterization of rowing as a quasi-religious experience, not just a science or even an art. Perhaps when he and his teammates got "in swing," Joe experienced some of the religious intensity to which Pocock alluded.


Around the same time, the Nazi Party staged a rally in Nuremberg. Leni Riefenstahl documented the event, although she never assembled the footage into a feature film. At the rally, Hitler announced three new laws: first, that the swastika would become the official flag of Germany; second, that German Jews were to be stripped of their citizenship; third, that Germans were forbidden from marrying or associating with Jews in any way. The so-called Nuremberg Laws signaled the growing plight of the Jews in Europe: suddenly they had no legal protection from the violence and cruelty of German society or the German state. In the United States, some proposed boycotting the Olympics to protest the Nuremberg Laws.

Hitler's Nuremberg Laws are often interpreted as the first decisive step against German Jews—previously, Hitler had tested the waters with inflammatory anti-Semitic rhetoric, but now he showed his confidence by putting abusive, totalitarian laws on the book, doing everything short of making it illegal to be Jewish. It's important to recognize that, even if relatively few Americans took note of Hitler's actions, there were still many Americans who did and who wanted to boycott the Olympic games.


Joe spent his first weeks back in campus studying engineering and spending as much time as he could with Joyce, whom he hadn't seen all summer. When he had any free time, however, his top priority was rowing. He enjoyed hanging out with his friends, Roger Morris, Chuck Day, Shorty Hunt, and Johnny White. One day, Joe noticed Jim McMillin, a JV rower from the previous year, working as a janitor. Sympathetic, Joe shook hands with McMillin, and admitted that he, too, had worked as a janitor. Before long, Joe and McMillin had become good friends; Joe would even work alongside McMillin.

Joe continued to bond with his teammates, now cognizant that he wasn't alone in his working-class roots and humble means of supporting himself. In particular, notice that Joe was no longer shy about talking about his part-time jobs, even though in the past he'd proudly guarded the secret that he had to work at night to pay for his education.

George Pocock continued to spend time with Joe; he asked Joe about his family, and learned that he and Joe had a lot in common—they came from working-class families, and their mothers had died when they were young. He began to understand the "essence of Joe Rantz."

Pocock seems to have identified with Joe on many different levels as he began to size up Joe and understand how to use him on the crew team.

Varsity practice began on October 21; right away, last season's rivalries flared up again. Ulbrickson made it clear that he would be mixing different boats to determine the perfect combination. He combined the freshmen champions, now sophomores, as well as the varsity and JV teams. Ulbrickson moved Joe between several boats, none of them first boat. Joe found that he missed rowing alongside his old teammates, especially Shorty Hunt—his only teammate who'd been assigned to boat one.

Ulbrickson continued to fiddle with the boating configurations, showing that he still wasn't sure how best to triumph at the Olympics. For a while, it seemed that Joe would never get his chance to attend the Olympics, given that Ulbrickson put him in a low-ranking boat.

On October 25, Joe learned that Thula was dead of septicemia (blood poisoning). He was shocked—he'd never really liked his stepmother, but she'd been an important part of his life. Joe told Harry that he was sorry for his loss, and then they talked about Thula's life for a long time. Suddenly Harry announced to Joe that he was going to build a house for his family—one where Joe would be welcome to live. Joe wasn't sure what to do; he drove back to school, confused, angry, and resentful.

Joe's life was full of instability and personal tragedy at this time—Thula, a woman who seemingly never loved him (and who, one can only assume, he never really loved) died, filling Joe with pain and guilt. The passage further implies that Joe's personal pain prevented him from succeeding as a rower—he couldn't focus on winning.

For much of the fall, Seattle experienced horrible, rainy weather, and the crew team rowed in cold, miserable conditions. Ulbrickson announced that the last day of training would be November 25, after which the team would have a competition to determine who'd be on the varsity team after Christmas. He insisted that the teams row no faster than twenty-six strokes per minute—he wanted to determine the rowers' power. Leading up to the final days of training, Joe got the news that his old friend and neighbor, Charlie McDonald, had died in a car crash. On November 25, Joe's boat came in third. In spite of Joe's lackluster performances, George Pocock continued to watch him closely.

Joe endured more personal tragedy—Charlie McDonald wasn't his close friend, but he was one of the few people with whom he'd enjoyed a stable, happy relationship for most of his life. As a result, it's suggested, Joe continued to falter in the water. However, Pocock now recognized his potential and continued to keep an eye on him, seeing that Joe at his best could be a phenomenally talented rower.

On December 2, Harry acquired property near his son Fred's house, and began building a house with his own hands. On December 8, the Amateur Athletic Union of the United States voted against boycotting the Olympics. This was a victory for Olympic hopefuls in America, but also for Adolf Hitler, "who was rapidly learning just how ready the world was to be deceived." While there was a strong anti-Nazi movement in America, organized largely by unions, Jews, Catholics, and academics, it failed to sway Avery Brundage, the president of the American Olympic Committee. Brundage made statements suggesting that Jews were Communists, and that America couldn't boycott the Olympics since some of its own institutions banned Jews. Most outrageously, Brundage scolded Jews for letting "Old World hatreds" stand in the way of "clean American sport." In the end, it was decided that America would compete at the Olympics.

Avery Brundage represents the casual anti-Semitism of much of American society during the 1930s. Few Americans would have approved of Hitler's genocidal policies, but far too many were willing to tolerate or ignore some anti-Semitism. Brundage dismissed Jewish protesters' demands that American boycott the Olympics as "Old World hatreds"—an absurd claim, considering that the Jews were protesting *Hitler's "Old World hatred" of the Jews. In all, Brundage's willful obliviousness suggests that Hitler gained power in part because people were willing to look the other way at his racist agenda, or they prioritized other matters, such as athletic achievement.*

CHAPTER 13

On January 9, 1936, Al Ulbrickson assembled his team and notified everyone that they were about to embark on the most "grueling crew season" in Washington history. It was an Olympic year, and Ulbrickson was determined to send a Washington team to Berlin. Ulbrickson went on to announce that Joe, along with Shorty and Roger, had been bumped up to varsity. Joe was surprised—he'd been rowing third boat all year. Nevertheless, he proceeded with his training, focusing on technique and power. Joe and his varsity teammates didn't work well together, however; their form was poor.

This first section establishes the main challenge of Part Four of the book: Joe and his varsity teammates must learn how to work together and row to glory at the 1936 Berlin Olympics. As the 1936 season began, however, Joe and his varsity peers didn't know how to work together—they were individually talented, but they couldn't really get in "swing."

Ulbrickson relied on George Pocock to improve the rowers' form and technique. In general, he was pleased: with Pocock's help, the rowers were getting better. Ulbrickson was confident that Bobby Moch would be coxswain on the varsity team; he was small, smart, and charismatic—the perfect coxswain combination. A good coxswain is, in a sense, the captain of the boat: he must know the oarsmen well enough to understand their capabilities over the course of a long race, and he must size up the other teams to decide how to row. Bobby, who'd grown up in southwestern Washington, was a lifelong sports lover, and in spite of his small stature, he'd always been an enthusiastic athlete. Ulbrickson admired Bobby's tenacity and intelligence—at first, Bobby wasn't a popular coxswain, but gradually he won over his teammates.

Bobby was a great coxswain in large part because he was the most traditionally "smart" person on the team (later he'd attended Harvard Law and become a great lawyer). As coxswain, Bobby excelled at sizing up his competition and determining the optimal strategy for victory. And like many of his teammates, Bobby had to climb uphill to succeed on the Washington rowing team; he had to convince his classmates to like him enough to respect his authority. Furthermore, like Joe and many other rowers at Washington, Bobby hailed from a small town in Washington, isolated from Seattle, the nearest big city.

In February, Ulbrickson dropped Joe from boat one to boat two, and then down to boat three. Meanwhile, George Pocock began to get a sense for Joe's rowing style: Joe was talented but sloppy, and he didn't understand how to work with his teammates. Privately, Pocock tried to encourage Joe not to miss his chance at the Olympics. He said, "when you really start trusting those other boys, you will feel a power at work within you that is far beyond anything you've ever imagined." One weekend, Joe drove Joyce to visit Harry at Harry's new house. There, Joyce immediately felt sympathetic for Harry's other children, who now had to grow up without their mother. Joyce got along with Harry, and she instinctively "played mother" with the children. Privately, however, she hated Harry for what he'd done to Joe. Joe entertained Harry's children (his half-siblings) with banjo music, making them smile and sing.

As Pocock observed Joe more and more closely, he began to realize what Joe was missing—the ability to trust in his teammates. Pocock recognized Joe's potential, however, and—it's strongly implied—played a decisive role in making sure that Ulbrickson kept Joe on the varsity team. The passage parallels Joe's adjustment to the new crew lineup with his gradual adjustment to his new family situation. Instead of allowing his resentment for his father to consume him, he managed to take the high ground and get along with Harry's children (if not Harry himself). Here, as in the rest of the book, Joe improved as a rower by squaring away his personal life.

On March 19, Al Ulbrickson was ready to announce his best bet for an Olympic boat: Roger Morris, Chuck Day, Gordy Adam (a sophomore from the nearby Nooksack River), Johnny White, Jim McMillin, Shorty Hunt, and two more sophomores, Merton Hatch and Don Hume. Hume was already a highly talented rower, with a powerful, smooth pull. Joe, on the other hand, had been relegated to the third boat. On March 21, however, Joe was moved up to Olympic boat, in the seventh seat, bumping out Merton Hatch. This, Joe sensed, was his chance to prove himself to be Olympic material.

Notably, Ulbrickson's final lineup incorporated sophomores, juniors, and seniors, testifying to Brown's previous claim that the best crew teams are often relatively diverse. Brown doesn't explain why Joe was bumped up to first boat, but he strongly implies that Pocock intervened, perhaps recognizing Joe's potential for getting in swing and appreciating the mystical side of rowing.

In the coming weeks, Joe adjusted to his new teammates; he befriended Gordy Adam and Don Hume, and continued to get along well with Roger Morris, Chuck Day, Jim McMillin, and Johnny White. He began to feel the feeling Pocock had talked about—the feeling of unity with his fellow oarsmen. On March 23, Joe's boat beat the other boats by seven boatlengths. Afterwards, Ulbrickson knew he'd made the right decision: he had an Olympic-caliber boat on his hands. He officially made Joe and his peers the varsity team—from now on, they'd be rowing in the **Husky Clipper**, a beautiful, sleek shell, even by Pocock's high standards. Perhaps the boys in the boat succeeded because they came from similar backgrounds—almost all were from working-class homes, or had been humbled by the Great Depression in some way. They were strong, but also humble, and knew the importance of working together.

The teammates quickly learned how to work together, confirming Ulbrickson and Pocock's talents for coaching and sizing up rowers. Brown suggests that the boys in the boat got along partly because they had similar backgrounds; indeed, by showing how Joe bonded with Roger, Jim, and Johnny, Brown has already reinforced this theory. Joe and his friends weren't afraid of doing hard work or putting up with pain for the greater good of victory—indeed, they'd been doing so in one way or another for most of their lives. This is the first time the Husky Clipper *is introduced—a single object that comes to symbolize the team's entire victorious story.*

Ulbrickson had a few important races on his horizon: the Pacific Coast Regatta in California, the Poughkeepsie regatta, and, most importantly, the Olympic time trials in Princeton, New Jersey. Meanwhile, Ebright was even more confident than Ulbrickson; his own varsity team had posted a record three-mile time. Ulbrickson tried to ensure a Washington victory against Cal by making his varsity athletes eat protein and calcium-heavy food—including a disgusting pink calcium solution.

Ulbrickson excelled as a coach because he understood that rowers had to maintain a highly regimented lifestyle: they had to eat well, sleep lots, and keep their minds sharp.

The Cal varsity team arrived in Seattle on April 14 for the annual regatta. As usual, Ulbrickson tried to confuse Cal by making pessimistic statements about his team's weaknesses. On April 18 the weather was beautiful, and a huge throng of crew fans turned out to watch the competition—the largest crowd ever to witness a crew race in the Northwest. The first race was the freshman race. Cal gained an early lead, but the Washington freshmen won by a considerable margin, posting a freshman record. The JV race was an easy victory for Washington. The final race of the day was the varsity race. Both Cal and Washington began the race by rowing at a high stroke rate. Bobby Moch focused on maintaining a consistent stroke rate, rather than rowing with maximum power, as the Cal team tried to do. By the two-mile mark, Washington had gained a small lead; even after Cal tried to pull ahead by a higher stroke rate, Moch kept the same steady pace. With half a mile to go, Moch called for Don Hume to pick up the stroke race slightly, and Washington rowed in perfect **swing**, winning the race by three boatlengths, and setting a new record for the course. Ulbrickson had a lot to be proud of: he'd won all three titles, redeeming himself in the eyes of Seattle's elite, and his varsity team had defeated the defending national champions.

Ulbrickson's teams easily won the JV and freshman competitions, reinforcing Ulbrickson's status as one of the country's best rowing coaches. But the JV and freshman competitions only built up to the main event—the varsity race. Here, the varsity team won by getting into perfect swing, demonstrating that Ulbrickson' instincts had been right. By assembling a group of highly talented rowers who, coincidentally or not, hailed from similar socioeconomic backgrounds and had learned how to work together, Ulbrickson created one of the best rowing teams in history—one that could get in swing almost without trying. The Washington team's decisive win against Cal, the school that had previously produced Olympic gold medalists in rowing, signaled that 1936 would be Washington's year at the Berlin Olympic games.

CHAPTER 14

On April 20, Hitler turned forty-seven. In the past month, he'd violated the Treaty of Versailles by occupying the Rhineland, in response to which English diplomats agreed to allow Germany to keep its new landholdings. Encouraged by his military success, Hitler looked forward to the Olympics as an opportunity to show off Germany's sophistication and peacefulness, disguising the brutality of his regime. Hitler and Goebbels commissioned Riefenstahl to direct *Olympia*, a propaganda film about the 1936 games, designed to glamorize fascist Germany.

In 1936, Hitler took decisive steps to prove to the world that Germany was a military force to be reckoned with. However, instead of opposing Germany militarily, European diplomats, particularly in the United Kingdom, believed that they should appease Hitler and allow Germany to keep its new landholdings. In part, the passage suggests, the international community appeased Hitler because Hitler was a master of public relations, using the Olympics as a sign of Germany's benevolence.

In Washington, Ulbrickson encouraged his victorious varsity athletes to square all personal affairs so they could focus on rowing. To his fury, however, Ulbrickson discovered that four of his varsity athletes had incompletes in school, meaning that they could be declared ineligible for rowing. He ordered them to bring up their grades. To his delight, Don Hume aced his final exam, and the other three athletes did well enough to qualify for rowing. Meanwhile, the varsity team bonded and continued to row spectacularly. At the same time, Ky Ebright prepared his team for Poughkeepsie, confident that he'd be able to defend Cal's national title and send a team to the Olympics.

Ulbrickson continued to adopt a "holistic" approach to rowing: he believed that the rowers needed to excel in all aspects of their lives. Ulbrickson had practical reasons for using this approach to coaching—his rowers literally couldn't row for Washington unless they got good enough grades. But Ulbrickson also pushed his athletes to do more than the bare minimum academically, all the while encouraging his athletes to row at the peak of their abilities.

On June 10, Washington's varsity team headed out to Poughkeepsie by train; Ulbrickson had instructed his athletes to pack as if they were going to Berlin. A band played as the train left the station, and thousands of people showed up to cheer the team. As Joe climbed on the train, he saw Joyce with her parents, cheering for him. During the train ride, Tom Bolles, George Pocock, and Al Ulbrickson held strategy sessions to ensure that Washington would be able to push ahead in the final mile of the race. Ulbrickson suggested a novel strategy: start with a low stroke rate, build through the second mile, and then row the second half of the race with a high stroke rate.

The large crowd at the train station reiterates that rowing was one of the most popular sports—and one of the key community events—of 1930s America. Ulbrickson and his fellow coaches had a strategic challenge ahead of them: they had to re-train their athletes to save their energy for the final mile of the race, ensuring that they wouldn't lose steam before they reached the finish line.

On June 14, the team arrived in Poughkeepsie. The varsity athletes had plenty of reason to be confident, but there were rumors that Cal had turned out a record time for the four-mile race. Ulbrickson tried to keep his team from reading about Cal in the papers, and encouraged them to focus on getting sleep and staying in shape. Late at night, however, the varsity boys had been perfecting their strokes, to the point where they could row in **swing** without even trying—they knew they were in great shape for the regatta.

Ulbrickson wanted to prevent his athletes from reading too much about the Cal team's successes—and, in the era before smartphones, he largely succeeded. At the same time, the varsity team continued to stay in swing, reflecting the athletes' close friendship and expert teamwork in the boat.

Shortly before the regatta, news broke that Max Schmeling, the world heavyweight champion from 1930 to 1932, had defeated Joe Louis, a young black boxer, and one of the first black athletes to become acclaimed among white Americans. Hitler was overjoyed with Schmeling's victory, since it seemed to confirmed his racist theories of Aryan superiority. Two years later, however, Louis would defeat Schmeling in less than three minutes, and go on to reign as world heavyweight champion for more than a decade.

In Germany, Joe Louis's defeat against Max Schmeling was greeted as a sign of "Aryan" superiority to other races. This reiterates one of the key points of the book: sporting events are deeply political. The athletes are often competing on behalf of their cities, countries, races, and religions, meaning that an athletic victory can also be a victory for a specific culture or community.

The evening before the regatta, the varsity Washington crew rowed up to Hyde Park on the Hudson, where President Franklin Roosevelt was said to live. After managing to find the president's estate, the athletes announced themselves as the varsity Washington crew team; a servant let them inside and introduced them to Franklin Roosevelt Jr., the president's son. Franklin Jr. talked about how he'd rowed at Harvard and the rumors that Tom Bolles would be transferring there if he could pull off a win at Poughkeepsie that year. He also showed the athletes around his huge estate, even letting them sit in the armchair where the president delivered his famous fireside chats.

While the athletes didn't meet the president here, they met the president's son. Their encounter demonstrates the strong link between rowing and elitism in the early 20th century. Rowing was a sign of social status, especially at an elite East Coast university such as Harvard. But rowing was also a way for cultural outsiders (such as the West Coast, working-class Washington team) to enter *the ranks of the elite—the athletes literally used rowing to enter the president's mansion.*

On the morning of the regatta, Bolles was contemplating moving to Harvard, as Franklin Junior had hinted. In the end, his freshman team performed brilliantly, beating Cal by a boatlength; shortly afterwards, Bolles left Washington for Harvard. Next was the JV race, and again, Washington easily triumphed, beating the nearest competition by three boatlengths. As the audience prepared for the varsity race, Ulbrickson knew he had a chance to sweep the regatta and win all three races.

The passage builds up the suspense: would Ulbrickson redeem himself and sweep all three titles at Poughkeepsie? Meanwhile, the fact that Bolles was secretly contemplating moving to Harvard reiterates that, although West Coast crew teams were "up and coming" in the 1930s, the most popular, respected programs in the country were still based on the East Coast at elite universities.

The varsity race began promptly at eight pm, and Washington quickly fell behind—just as Ulbrickson had planned. Bobby Moch kept his crew at an even twenty-eight strokes per minute, not minding that his team was in seventh place. At the mile point, Washington passed Cal, though Cal quickly moved back into the lead. By two miles, Washington was in fifth place. This worried Ulbrickson, since falling so far behind the competition had never been part of his strategy. With a mile to go, however, Bobby began yelling for the crew to row at a higher rate—they were three boatlengths behind. Then, as if by magic, Washington settled into **swing**: the rowers seemed to be rowing with perfect efficiency. The boat moved into third, then second place. While Cal rowed erratically, Washington seemed perfectly controlled, and in the end, it won by less than a boatlength.

The Washington team won the regatta because it fell into swing in the middle of the race. After several bumpy years, the athletes learned how to work alongside one another—not as a boatful of individuals, but as one team. Furthermore, the varsity boat won the regatta because of the ingenuity of Ulbrickson's strategy. By starting slow, the Washington rowers tricked their competitors into underestimating their power—a shrewd strategy, especially since the East Coast rowers were already likely to underestimate their relatively obscure West Coast rivals.

Ulbrickson had won a great victory at Poughkeepsie, but he would have to win one more time to stay ahead of his rival, Ebright. Ulbrickson congratulated his teams, but urged them to stay focused on qualifying for the Olympics. Joe and the varsity team could feel how close they were to going to Berlin.

Ulbrickson knew that celebrating after the regatta would have been premature; he wanted his athletes to succeed on the East Coast once more, at the Olympic qualifying trials.

CHAPTER 15

After the 1936 regatta, it began to sink in that West Coast crew programs were more than a match for their East Coast counterparts. Washington's victory at the regatta established it as the best crew program in the country—even Ebright said so. In July 1, the team packed for Princeton, where it would be rowing in the Olympic time trials. For the first few days, the Washington team enjoyed Princeton's elegant campus and posh environment; they had light workouts twice a day, but nothing more. However, Joe and his peers were well-aware of the importance of the time trials—if they failed here, they'd never make it to Berlin.

Washington's national title sent a clear message to the East Coast crew programs of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. At Princeton, the Washington team felt out-of-place, but stayed focused on qualifying for the Olympics, recognizing that they'd effectively been training for this race for years.

In their preliminary heat, the varsity Washington team faced Princeton and the New York Athletic Club, neither much of a contender. Washington won the race easily; however Cal had a much more difficult preliminary heat against Navy and Penn, winning by less than a boatlength. Cal ended up posting a faster time than Washington, causing the Washington team to doubt itself once again.

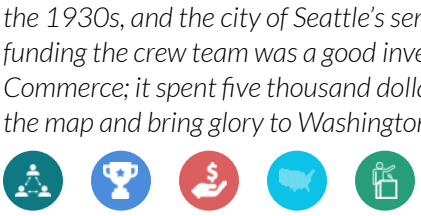
Even after the Washington team rowed to great success in its preliminary heat, it continued to doubt itself. Ulbrickson had set his varsity athletes' sights so high (Olympic gold!) that nothing short of a world-class performance would reassure them.

In the final Olympic trial, Cal faced Pennsylvania, Washington, and the New York Athletic Club. Washington started poorly, with Gordy and Jim McMillin losing hold of their oars. Meanwhile, Pennsylvania took the lead, followed by the Athletic Club and Cal. Washington kept a low stroke rate, but managed to pass the Athletic Club before the halfway mark. Holding a steady stroke count of thirty-four, Washington rowed with remarkable power, passing California, then Pennsylvania, and winning handily. Washington was going to Berlin. Ulbrickson was overjoyed: he'd managed to assemble the perfect team and coach them to victory with the perfect strategy.

As in many of their other successful races, the Washington varsity rowers triumphed because they were able to trick their competitors into underestimating them. By starting from behind, the team saved enough energy for a powerful, unbeatable finish; furthermore, by maintaining a low stroke rate, the team was able to row very efficiently and get in swing almost without trying. In short, Ulbrickson's clever planning, combined with the athletes' strength and technique, proved unbeatable.

In order to fund an excursion to the Olympics, Ulbrickson quickly learned, the team was going to have to pay its own way: the American Olympic Committee didn't have funds for a team. Now, Washington needed to come up with five thousand dollars, or else Penn would go in Washington's place. Furious, Ulbrickson decided not to tell his team about the funding crisis for fear of alarming them. However, he contacted Paul Coughlin from the Washington alumni association, who in turn spoke to the mayor of Seattle. Soon after, donations poured in, including a check for five thousand dollars from the Seattle Chamber of Commerce. Washington had the funds to go to Berlin after all.

In the 21st century it would be almost inconceivable for an American team to lack the funding necessary to travel to the Olympics—but during the Great Depression, such a situation wasn't uncommon. Wisely, Ulbrickson didn't tell his athletes about the financial crisis, so that they could stay focused on rowing, not logistics. The fact that so many well-wishers and fans came together to help the Washington team testifies to the popularity of rowing in the 1930s, and the city of Seattle's sense of civic pride. In a sense, funding the crew team was a good investment for the Chamber of Commerce; it spent five thousand dollars in order to put Seattle on the map and bring glory to Washington.



The varsity team trained on Long Island, at the New York Athletic Club. The club was a lavish place, complete with a billiards room and an oyster bar, and the team enjoyed training there in the weeks following its victory at Poughkeepsie. The team also enjoyed traveling out to Coney Island and Times Square in New York City. Several people recognized the team from photographs in the newspapers. Joe and his peers took a trip to the top of the recently completed Empire State Building. There, looking down at the city, he began to realize that he was now a representative of the American way of life—liberty, "mutual respect, humility, fair play."

The Washington crew team's success led it to some of the most exclusive places in the world, and into contact with some of the most powerful people in America. Joe and his peers had never been to New York City before, but while visiting there, they came to realize that they weren't just athletes—they were representatives of their country, standing for American values and the American way of life. As Brown has endeavored to show, Joe and his teammates really were *representative of the American way of life: they'd survived the Depression through their own ingenuity, perseverance, and optimism.*

During the team's training period on Long Island, Bobby Moch received a letter from his father; Bobby had written his father about visiting relatives in Switzerland. Now, Bobby's father revealed to Bobby that his relatives—and, thus, Bobby himself—were Jewish. When Bobby learned the news, he burst into tears. Jews were a persecuted minority in America in the 1930s, but Bobby had been raised to believe that people should be judged by their abilities, not their race. Now, he realized that his father hadn't wanted to live according to his own rule, and had instead treated his race like "a secret to be ashamed of."

In the 1930s, American anti-Semitism was socially accepted to a degree that would be shocking by most contemporary standards. Certainly, there were many who believed that race shouldn't make a difference; however even some of these Americans (including Bobby's parents, it would seem) caved in to the pressures of societal anti-Semitism and hesitated to celebrate their Jewish heritage for fear of facing discrimination.

On July 9, the team took a trip out to Huckleberry Island, off the coast of Long Island. There, the team seemed utterly at ease. Four days later, they packed and prepared to sail for Berlin on the *SS Manhattan*, accompanied by Al Ulbrickson and George Pocock. Before leaving, the team attended an Olympic reception at the Lincoln Hotel, where they met other American Olympians, including the runner Jesse Owens. The next day, the team picked up its visas and Olympic credentials, and attended Loew's State Theater. The next morning, they finally boarded the *Manhattan* and set sail. The team stood on the deck, waving flags at the thousands of fans who'd come to wish the Olympic team good luck. Joe looked down from the deck, trying to remember everything so that he'd be able to tell Joyce about it when he returned.

The American Olympic Committee didn't have the funds to send the Washington team to the Olympics, but it nonetheless organized a lavish party for the Olympic team at the Lincoln Hotel. Jesse Owens is perhaps the most famous athlete to compete in the 1936 Olympic games—more than any other athlete of the era, his success dealt a blow to Hitler's bogus theories of Aryan racial superiority (Owens was African American, and faced significant racial prejudice both in Germany and in his own country). During the voyage to Germany, the passage suggests, Joe spent a lot of time thinking about Joyce, still one of his closest friends in the world.

CHAPTER 16

While the U.S. Olympic team sailed to Europe, Nazi soldiers in Berlin were arresting thousands of Romani families and sending them to detention camps, where foreigners wouldn't be able to see them. Only a few years later, most of them would be murdered in death camps. Goebbels had converted Berlin into "a place where illusion could be perfected," so that journalists and statesmen would return to their own countries singing praises for Hitler's country. Goebbels arranged for international journalists attempting to interview Berlin's Jews about their lives to be referred to state offices, so that they wouldn't learn anything that could damage the Reich's reputation. Leni Riefenstahl prepared her team of cameramen to film the Olympics, instructing them to film Hitler and his entourage from below eye level so that they looked larger than life.

While many visitors to the Olympics saw Berlin as a beautiful, civilized city, Brown emphasizes the true horrors of the situation: beneath the bright, friendly façade of the Olympics, Germany was becoming one of the most brutal, sadistic states in the world. Nevertheless, thanks to the ingenuity of Goebbels and Riefenstahl, among others, the Nazis were able to conceal evidence of their evils and project an image of benevolence and even of tolerance. By strictly controlling journalists' access, Goebbels ensured that these they would write only flattering stories.

During the voyage to Europe, Roger Morris and Don Hume became very seasick and lost a lot of weight. Joe didn't get too seasick, but he resented that the ships cook wouldn't serve him more food. He liked the blue Olympic uniform he'd been issued, however, considering that he "had worn the same rumpled sweater to rowing practice for a year." During the voyage, he and the rest of team worked out with the rowing machine, but Ulbrickson quickly ordered them not to, arguing that too much machine rowing would interfere with their form on the water. The teammates succeeded in lifting the ban on large portions of food, though Ulbrickson stopped them from eating anything too fattening.

During the voyage, Don Hume became seriously ill, and didn't fully recover until after the Olympics were over—adding more questions about the Americans' chances. Joe loved his new uniform, conscious, perhaps, of how his prowess as a rower had brought him new respect and opportunities for social advancement. Strangely, Ulbrickson didn't want his athletes working out during their long voyage, meaning that they inevitably gained weight and lost some of their muscle toning.

Eleanor Holm, a gold medalist in swimming, and one of the most popular athletes on the ship, was notorious for drinking. More than once, she stayed up late drinking champagne with journalists and friends. Even after Avery Brundage threatened to send her back to America, she continued drinking, and Brundage expelled her from the U.S. Olympic team. In the long run, Holm's expulsion was good for her career, since it made her even more famous.

At the time, the consumption of alcohol was legal (Prohibition had been repealed in 1933), but Avery Brundage didn't want an Olympic athlete embarrassing herself with drunken behavior. The way Brundage treated Holm may have reflected his sexist double standards (especially considering how much drinking the male Olympians did while in Berlin).

On July 21 the ship reached Ireland, and then proceeded to France. The ship finally arrived in Germany on the night of July 23. The oarsmen were glad to be at the end of their voyage—they hadn't had a chance to exercise very much, and they had all gained weight. In Hamburg, the team listened as the city's *Bürgermeister* (mayor) delivered a welcome address in German—a language none of them could understand. They arrived in Berlin by train that afternoon, and were stunned to find a lavish reception awaiting them. A bus carried the athletes toward the city hall. There, Avery Brundage accepted the keys to the city of Berlin and made a speech to the athletes. He declared, "No nation since ancient Greece has captured the true Olympic spirit as has Germany!"

Avery Brundage's statement about the glory of the Nazis' Olympics clearly reflected his own anti-Semitism, or at least his willingness to overlook "politics" in the name of "pure sport" (something arguably impossible in reality). However, the truth is that many visitors, including those who opposed the Nazis' policies, were bowled over by the Olympic proceedings in Berlin. The Nazis saw themselves as the rightful heirs to the classical Western tradition of the Greeks and the Romans, so they must have been overjoyed by Brundage's words of praise. Tragically, there were far too many powerful people who ignored Hitler's brutal policies because they were distracted by the pomp and pageantry of the Olympics.

The Olympic team was to stay in the police cadet training academy, a beautiful, perfectly clean, modern building. Later that evening, Joe took a walk and passed by a Jewish synagogue, a Prussian mansion, and, finally, the regatta course at Grünau, where he'd be competing in a few days. Joe had no way of knowing Berlin's "bloody secret"—indeed, he thought the neighborhood to be the most peaceful place he'd ever visited.

Evidently, Germany had allowed some Jewish synagogues to remain standing, in order to reassure international visitors that its policies against the Jews were less repressive than some had claimed. Because the Nazis took great care with the Olympic proceedings, they succeeded in fooling people like Joe into underestimating the danger of the Third Reich.

The next morning, the rowing team began training. Ulbrickson noticed that the Germany rowing team was highly disciplined. As the American team was preparing to practice, a photographer accidentally broke the **Husky Clipper**. Pocock worked to repair the shell while the team practiced in a less aerodynamic boat. Their form was sloppy—Ulbrickson hadn't seen his team row so poorly in months. For the next few days, the team performed badly, and then spent afternoons exploring Berlin. When Germans greeted them by saying, "Heil, Hitler!", they answered, "Heil, Roosevelt!" Then, Gordy Adam and Don Hume fell ill. Meanwhile, George Pocock studied the competition. The Italian and German teams were impressive, but the biggest threat was the British team.

In the era before commercial aviation, having to travel across the ocean to attend the Olympics was a major disadvantage—and here, it's easy enough to see why. The American team was overweight and out of shape, while the German team had been training rigorously for months without interruption. However, the Americans didn't allow their competitors to intimidate them—instead, they proudly stood up for their country. Pocock, an Englishman himself, recognized that the British team would be America's main competitors. The modern sport of rowing was an English invention, and the British crew was still the most respected in the world.

On August 1, the Olympic Opening Ceremony took place—"perhaps the most spectacular public ceremony the world had yet seen." Inside the Olympic stadium, Leni Riefenstahl and Joseph Goebbels were, as usual, arguing. Riefenstahl wanted to place cameras in certain areas of the stage, while Goebbels thought that the cameras would be distracting and unsafe. Reifenstahl refused to move until Goebbels allowed her to place her camera close to Hitler; the conflict only ended when Hermann Göring, the Marshal of the Reichstag (and Hitler's second-in-command), allowed the camera to remain in place. For the rest of the Olympics, however, Goebbels and Riefenstahl would continue to argue.

The Olympic Opening Ceremony was designed to impress Berlin's international visitors, and by all accounts, it did. The Nazis were masters of ceremony and political pageantry—every public event was carefully choreographed, to the point where even a single unaccounted for camera could upset Joseph Goebbels, the Minister of Propaganda. Goebbels and Riefenstahl quarreled behind the scenes of the Olympic ceremony but in public the Nazis projected an image of perfect unity.

In the afternoon, Adolf Hitler made his way to the stadium. He arrived at the stadium at exactly 4 pm, at which time over one hundred thousand Germans rose to their feet and cried his name. A little girl sang the German national anthem, and then the bell from the bell tower began to ring. The Olympic teams were invited to the stage, one by one, to raise their countries' flags and listen to their national anthems. When the American team came to the stage, there were cheers but also whistling and stamped feet (the European counterpart to booing and catcalling). George Pocock remembers that the American athletes deliberately marched out of step with the music to sabotage the formality of the proceedings. Some of the Americans began singing "The gang's all here," even as the orchestra played Wagner and Strauss music.

At least on paper, the purpose of the Olympic opening ceremony was to celebrate international cooperation and the participating countries' mutual respect. However, as the largely German audience's whistles and foot stamps would indicate, the Olympics did not conceal (and in some ways enhanced) the rivalries between countries. By the same token, the Americans showed their *subtle defiance for Germany by marching out of sync with the music and singing American songs that clashed with the formality of the orchestra's classical (and German) music.*

When all the athletes were assembled on the stage, the president of the German Olympic Committee read a long, boring speech, and then introduced Hitler, who promptly announced the games open. The orchestra swelled, and the Olympic flag was raised high. The ceremony was stunning—almost nobody in the audience had seen anything like it. Roger Morris and Johnny White agreed that it was "Grand" and "impressive." In effect, Nazi Germany used the Olympic ceremony to send a message: "Welcome to the Third Reich. We are not what they say we are."

The Nazis succeeded in fooling many of the Olympians in Berlin into believing that their state was trustworthy and benevolent. In retrospect, it is easy enough to see evidence of Germany's nationalistic pride and aggressiveness in the grandiose scale and strictly regimented format of the Olympic opening ceremony, but at the time, few saw anything sinister about it.

CHAPTER 17

As August went on, the weather became cold in Germany. The American rowing team continued to perform badly, rowing inefficiently and weakly. In the evening, they'd go drinking and eating fattening foods. On August 6, Al Ulbrickson finally put his foot down and ordered that they wouldn't be visiting Berlin or anywhere else until after the games were over. Ulbrickson had been paying close attention to the formidable British rowing team, especially the talented coxswain John Noel Duckworth and the stroke, William George Ranald Mundell Laurie. The British team reminded Ulbrickson of his own boys at their best—they rowed strategically, pressuring their opponents into increasing the stroke rate too much. As the preliminary heats approached, the American team was anxious about its chances of success.

In Germany, the Americans briefly became undisciplined and unfocused—but as before, Ulbrickson forced his athletes to maintain discipline both in and out of the boat. Ulbrickson recognized that he needed to whip his athletes back into shape if they were to have a shot at defeating the stellar British team, with its world-class coxswain and stroke. The British team was eerily similar to the American team, at least in terms of strategy: like the Americans, the British oarsmen liked to start from behind and work their way up to a high, almost unbeatable stroke rate.

At night, the crew team had a hard time sleeping—it seemed as if there was always some ruckus going on outside, whether from the military practicing its maneuvers at night, or from a drunken group of Olympians coming home late. The crew team developed a device that allowed them to empty a bucket of water on whoever was making a noise outside. One night, the boys tried out their device on a loud Yugoslavian team—they soaked the Yugoslavians, but also some German police officers. Furious the officers burst into the building and demanded to know who'd thrown the water. Looking innocent, the Americans suggested that the Canadians had done it. At lunch next day, the Yugoslavians began singing a strange version of "Yankee Doodle Dandy" to the Americans, implying that they knew the Americans were responsible. Bobby Moch became so furious that he started a fight. Soon, the entire mess hall was fighting. The fighting only ceased when the Dutch national crew separated everyone using "crisp, perfect, diplomatic English."

In this amusing passage, Brown emphasizes the American athlete's rowdiness and boisterousness. The Americans remained disciplined during their practices—but they also found time for pranks at the expense of the other Olympic teams. Amusingly, the Dutch national crew patched up the ensuing fight between the different Olympic teams, echoing Holland's reputation for being a neutral state. The passage might suggest that the Olympics are a microcosm for international relations, with different countries fighting one another—albeit in a prankish, way, so that the fight can be resolved before any real damage occurs. The passage becomes strangely poignant when one considers that, just a few years later, most of the countries involved in the scuffle became involved in an actual military conflict—and in World War Two, there could be no diplomatic solutions.

In the final days before the Olympics, the American crew team realized something important. Secretly, each one of them believed that they were here due to luck, and that every other member of the team was naturally talented. As the boys opened up to each other about their secret insecurities, they began to rebuild the bond of trust and unity that had helped them win on the Hudson earlier in the year. The boys knew they had two chances to row in the finals: they could win their preliminary heat outright, or they could win in a *repachage*—a second preliminary heat. In the days leading up to the heats, Ulbrickson made a point of backing off and letting the boys rest. Pocock had rebuilt the **Husky Clipper** for the Washington team; however, he noted that the American boats being used for the other rowing events were "heavy, shoddy, old, and decrepit." Sure enough, American teams did poorly in the other crew events at the 1936 Olympics.

The Washington rowers had an epiphany leading up to their races: they were all alike in their fear and insecurity. When Joe arrived at the University of Washington, for example, he thought he was the only one who had to work to pay his way through college, and the only one who thought he didn't belong on the team. Now, however, Joe and his peers realized that many of them came from similar backgrounds and had similar psychological insecurities. In finally realizing this, the athletes strengthened the bond of trust and friendship between them and probably improved their chances of succeeding at the Olympics.

On August 12, the day of the eight-oar preliminaries, Don Hume was still very sick, and he'd lost fourteen pounds. But he insisted that he was well enough to row that day. In the heat, America faced Japan, Britain, Czechoslovakia, and France. America got off to a bad start, with the Japanese taking an early lead. America passed the Czech team, then eased the stroke rate down to thirty-four. Meanwhile, the British team kept an equally low stroke rate, waiting for the perfect time to pull ahead. Gradually, America increased its rate, leading the British to do the same. But both teams were "saving something." As the teams entered the final mile, Britain was ahead, but the Americans began to pull harder. In the last hundred yards, they passed Britain and won by twenty feet. Don Hume rowed so intensely that he passed out after crossing the finish line. America had set a new world record.

America's preliminary victory over Britain could be said to symbolize the ascendance of American crew over its "old-world" counterpart—or, even more generally, the political ascendance of America, the most powerful country during the 20th century, over Britain, the most powerful country during the 19th century. However, the fact that Don Hume passed out after his victory didn't bode well for the Olympic finals—it wasn't clear if Hume would have the strength to continue on.

Al Ulbrickson was proud of his team, but he worried about the final race. Don Hume was still very sick, and seemed like he might have a bronchial infection. Meanwhile, the other teammates explored Berlin to celebrate their victory. Unbeknownst to any of them, Berlin was in the middle of one of the most barbaric periods in its history, during which troops captured and murdered tens of thousands of Jews, Catholics, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, and other "undesirables" living in the city. Instead of seeing the truth about Nazi Germany, though, the boys saw only the cheerful propaganda that Joseph Goebbels had worked hard to create.

The Nazi propagandists, organized by the cunning Joseph Goebbels, had done an outstanding job of concealing evidence of their own brutality from the international community. They'd effectively rebuilt Berlin so that it seemed as warm and inviting a place as possible—when, in reality, Berlin was undergoing a series of frightening changes that would result in the systematic murder of its Jewish, Romani, and homosexual populations.

After the *reperchage* the following day, Ulbrickson knew that America would be racing against Italy, Germany, Britain, Hungary, and Switzerland. To his fury, Germany and Italy had been given the two best lanes in the competition, lanes one and two (the protected lanes closest to shore), while Britain and America, the two top contenders, had been given the two worst lanes (the lanes farthest from shore, in which choppy water was most likely).

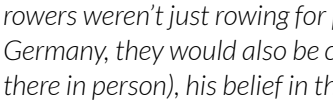
The passage suggests another reason why hosting the Olympics is often an advantage for the host country: there are many ways for the host country to reconfigure the Olympics finals to give its own athletes an advantage. Here, for example, Germany ensured that America and Britain were in the worst lanes, while Germany and its close ally, Italy, got the two best lanes.

The next morning, it rained heavily. At breakfast, the boys ate in silence—they'd been working for this day for the last three years. Ulbrickson had decided that Don Hume wouldn't be rowing: Don Coy, the alternate, would take his place. After some thought, however, the boys agreed that it was inconceivable for anyone but Hume to row with them. Jim McMillin, team captain, told Ulbrickson how the team felt. McMillin and Bobby Moch insisted that Hume could still row—in fact, they needed him to set the rhythm of the boat. Ulbrickson hesitated, and then agreed.

Ulbrickson had a long-lasting reputation as a thoughtful coach, who never allowed his emotions or instincts to interfere with the right decision. Here, however, Ulbrickson took a major risk—he sent Don Hume, a sick athlete, into the Olympic finals. In retrospect, however, Ulbrickson made the right decision—rowing without Hume would have thrown off the group's sense of unity, and therefore their swing.

At the water, tens of thousands of fans had turned out to watch the rowing finals. Rowing was the second most popular Olympic event at the time, after track, and many believed that Germany would win that year. Leni Riefenstahl's cameras had been carefully mounted, and as the hour of the race approached, German spectators shouted "Sieg Heil!", signaling that Adolf Hitler had arrived. The afternoon began with the shorter events, working up to the eight-man, four-mile race. Germany won many events, and after each victory, Hitler and his entourage cheered. At six pm, the boys, including Don Hume, prepared for their race. Ulbrickson and Pocock were nervous—the odds of taking gold with Hume in such poor shape were slim. Meanwhile, millions of Americans were listening to the radio for Olympic news.

Brown builds the suspense, emphasizing the adversity the American team would have to overcome to succeed in the finals. The earlier rowing finals ended in German victories, bringing glory to Germany and, implicitly, the Third Reich's ideology. Thus, the American rowers weren't just rowing for personal glory—by triumphing against Germany, they would also be challenging Hitler himself (as he was there in person), his belief in the superiority of an "Aryan" race, and the ideology of the fascist state.



The boys took their positions and prepared for the race to begin. With the wind howling, the official starter emerged from his tent, holding his flag. He shouted something unintelligible to the American and British teams, and then dropped the flag. Four of the boats pushed forward, but neither the British nor the American boat moved—the coxswains hadn't seen that the race had begun.

The chapter ends on a cliff-hanger: the Americans didn't see that the race was officially starting, meaning that they got off to a bad start before they even took their first strokes. With the deck stacked against them in almost every way, it must have seemed highly unlikely that they could win.

CHAPTER 18

Immediately following the events of the last chapter, Joe noticed that the other boats were moving. He shouted to Bobby, who shouted, "Row!", and the Americans began their race. The American rowers began to panic—they felt sure that they were going to lose, since they'd started late. Bobby realized that the team needed to build momentum quickly; he set a hard pace of thirty-eight. In lines one and two, the Germans and Italians were far ahead. Bobby Moch yelled for Hume to dial back the stroke rate a little.

The American rowers eventually noticed that the race had begun—understandably, they panicked when they realized that they were already losing. Bobby Moch demonstrated his talents as a coxswain by adjusting his team's strategy to the altered circumstances: instead of starting with slow, powerful strokes, he ordered his rowers to row at a rapid pace.

The boats moved down the water, and the winds became stronger. The British decided to try for an early lead, and pushed into second place behind Switzerland. Moch didn't pay much attention; he was sure that the British would tire themselves out in the first half of the race. Suddenly, Moch saw that Hume was white in the face, even as he kept rowing. Moch shouted to Hume, "Are you okay?" but Don didn't respond. A quarter of the way through the race, Britain, Germany, and Switzerland were ahead, with American and Italy behind them. But as the water grew choppier, America fell further behind.

Moch resisted the temptation to continue rowing at a high stroke rate; instead, he moved to keep the strike rate low, ensuring that the strokes themselves would be very powerful. However, Don Hume's bizarre behavior threatened to destroy the American team's chances of victory: Hume was rowing well, but he seemed to be on the verge of passing out, just as he'd done at the end of the preliminary race.

Knowing that he couldn't wait any longer, Bobby Moch called for the team to increase its stroke rate, but the heavy winds slowed down the boys' progress. Bobby looked at Don Hume again and saw that Hume was pale and seemingly about to pass out, even though he was still rowing. Knowing that he couldn't rely on Hume to set the pace for very much longer, Bobby called out for Joe to set the rhythm. But just as Bobby shouted to Joe, Hume's head snapped up, and he looked right at Bobby. Bobby yelled for Hume to pick up the pace, and Hume did, bringing the stroke rate to thirty-seven. By the 1500-meter mark, America had rowed into third place.

Moch continued to adjust to the changing circumstances: he increased the stroke rate to compensate for the strong winds (a reminder of what a huge disadvantage it was to be in the lane farthest from the shore). Moch himself didn't row, but his calm, intelligent leadership during the final proved invaluable for an American victory.

With only five hundred meters left, America was a boatlength behind Germany and Italy. Their boat had finally entered water that was protected from the wind by trees and buildings. As a result, the crew was able to row more powerfully and efficiently. Taking the pace up to forty strokes per minute, the American rowers felt pain unlike anything they'd ever experienced before. But they rowed in perfect unison, crossing the finish line at almost exactly the same time as the Italian and German boats. Nobody could tell who won. Then, a few moments later, the loudspeakers announced that America had won by less than a second.

In the final seconds of the race, America pulled ahead—overcoming not only Don Hume's sickness, but also its unfair lane assignment, its false start, and its athletes' outsider reputations in a sport traditionally dominated by genteel old-world athletes. In short, the Washington team's victory was a victory for "the little guy." Few people would have guessed that an internationally obscure crew program from the West Coast of the United States would become the best in the world.

Back in Seattle, in Harry's house, Joe's half-siblings cheered with delight at the news coming from the radio. Joyce, who was sitting in the house too, embraced Harry, her "father-in-law-to-be," and wept with joy.

Joe's triumph in the Berlin Olympics seemed to unite Harry and Joyce in joy (despite the fact that Joyce had previously expressed strong reservations about Harry).

CHAPTER 19

Immediately after the race, the American team shook hands with some Nazi officers. Don Hume accepted a massive wreath, which he passed to his teammates. Reporters asked Al Ulbrickson what he thought of his team winning a gold medal; he replied, "They were the finest I ever saw seated in a shell."

The American athletes enjoyed their triumph—they were the best in the world and, ultimately, the best rowers Ulbrickson ever coached.

The next day, Leni Riefenstahl asked to film the American team; she'd already gotten great footage of the race, which would appear in *Olympia*. Later, the boys watched the soccer final between Germany and Italy, and then received their own medals. Standing on the podium, every one of the boys fought back tears. Later that night, the team, except for Joe, went out drinking. Joe spent the night lying awake in his bed, staring at his gold medal. In the final moments of the race, he had realized something: he had no choice but to trust his teammates to work with him and row the boat to victory. Joe "felt whole."

21st century rowing enthusiasts can still enjoy the American team's victory in 1936 by watching Riefenstahl's Olympia*; it's a little surprising that Riefenstahl would make an American victory against a German team one of the central moments of her film. After the race, Joe realized that he'd formed a lifelong bond with his teammates. The fact that Joe was alone in his room when he realized this might suggest that, even if Joe will remain a quiet, humble man for the rest of his life, he made lifelong friends through rowing.*

EPILOGUE

Joe returned to Seattle in September, and began living in a room of the house Harry had built; then, a few days later, he returned to trying to make some money to support himself. Don Hume and Jim McMillin also returned home soon after the Olympics ended; Roger Morris, Chuck Day, and Bobby Moch, however, traveled across Europe for six weeks. George Pocock and Al Ulbrickson spent some time in England. By mid-October, everyone was back in Seattle. Bobby Moch had graduated with honors, and now he was working as an assistant coach under Ulbrickson.

After the 1936 Olympic games, the Washington rowers went off on different paths in life, even if they remained good friends. Yet even after his victory, Joe still had to work hard to support himself—Olympic gold wasn't a guarantee that the rest of his life would be easy. Moch, seemingly the most intellectual member of the team, graduated with honors, but continued to use his intelligence to help the Washington team.

The next year, on June 22, the boys, minus Bobby Moch, rowed in Poughkeepsie and defended their national title by four boatlengths. Many of Ulbrickson's peers said that the Washington team that year was the finest they'd ever seen. Afterwards, Roger Morris, Shorty Hunt, and Joe Rantz officially ended their collegiate rowing careers.

Joe was only a junior at the time of his Olympic victory—the next year, he and his fellow rowers defended their international reputation by rowing to great success at Poughkeepsie.

After the 1936 Olympics, the Nazis resumed their persecution of the Jews; Hitler abandoned any efforts to seem tolerant and open-minded for the sake of the international Olympic audience. The Olympics had made Germany appear like a model of civility and organization, and implicitly made Hitler's critics seem unreasonable. Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* premiered in Berlin in 1938, and the film was later shown in Hollywood to great acclaim. By 1939, however, any illusion of a civilized Fascist state was gone: Hitler invaded Poland, launching World War Two.

In the end, the 1936 Olympics were an important weapon for the Third Reich: they tricked other countries into thinking of the Reich as a generous state that welcomed foreigners and tolerated all kinds of diversity. This shouldn't suggest that nobody in the 1930s thought of Hitler as a dangerous man; however, the Olympics helped obscure some of the most horrific truths about Hitler and his regime.

Joe Rantz graduated in 1939 with a degree in engineering, and Joyce graduated at the same time with high Latin honors. Just a few hours after graduating, Joe and Joyce were married. Joe went to work for Union Oil, and later Boeing, where he designed planes for World War Two. He and Joyce lived in Lake Forest Park for the rest of their lives, and had five children. In his retirement, Joe rediscovered his love for woodworking.

It's no coincidence that many of the Olympic rowers graduated with high honors: Al Ulbrickson had taken great pains to ensure that his students succeeded academically, not just athletically. Brown suggests that Joe and Joyce lived "happily ever after"; Joyce was Joe's closest friend and the person who understood him best.

Bobby Moch attended law school while remaining on as a rowing coach at Washington; two years later, he transferred to Harvard Law while also coaching at MIT. He went on to become one of Seattle's most prominent attorneys. Jim McMillin took over Bobby Moch's coaching job at MIT, and later worked for Boeing as well. Chuck Day earned a medical degree and worked as a doctor in navy; later, he became a successful gynecologist. Shorty Hunt married his girlfriend and later founded a construction company. Don Hume had a successful career in mining, eventually becoming the president of the West Coast Mining Association. Johnny White worked for Bethlehem Steel. Gordy Adam worked for Boeing for thirty-eight years. Roger Morris spent World War Two doing construction, and later worked for the Manson Construction Company. Al Ulbrickson coached at Washington for another quarter century, and was later inducted into the National Rowing Hall of Fame. Ky Ebright won a third gold medal in 1948, and is remembered as one of the finest crew coaches in history. George Pocock maintained his reputation as the best boatmaker in the world. Mercifully, he never lived to see the day when fiberglass shells replaced the older wooden models, effectively making the art of boatmaking obsolete.

It's no surprise that Moch went on to become a great lawyer—he'd already demonstrated plenty of savvy and quick thinking as a coxswain. Notably, many of the other rowers continued to work side-by-side for the rest of their lives, especially those who went to Boeing. By rowing together, it would seem, Joe and his peers built lifelong friendships. Ulbrickson remained on as a coach for years to come, although Ky Ebright arguably overshadowed him in the long run, winning three Olympic gold medals. Eventually crew boats were standardized, so that all teams could have the same advantages in a race—however, the industrialization of boatmaking spelled the end of boatmaking as an art form. When mass-produced fiberglass replaced delicate, hand-carved wood as the primary material for shells, world-class artisans like Pocock, who took a nuanced, deeply spiritual view of the sport, fell out of fashion.

In 1971, the entire 1936 Olympic rowing crew was inducted into the Rowing Hall of Fame. The boys rowed together one final time in 1986. Then, in the 1990s, members of the team began to pass on, including Johnny White, Gordy Adam, Shorty Hunt, and Don Hume. In 2002, Joyce died; three years later, Bobby Moch and Jim McMillin died, too. Joe and Roger were the last surviving members of the Olympic crew team. Joe died peacefully in 2007, followed by Roger in 2009.

Most of the American Olympic rowers lived exceptionally long lives, and died within a few years of one another. Unsurprisingly, they're remembered as some of the best American rowers in history, as their place in the Rowing Hall of Fame would suggest.

In 2011, Daniel James Brown traveled to Berlin to visit the Olympic stadium. The regatta grounds looked much as they had in 1936, with young men testing their talents on the water. As he looked out, it occurred to him that in 1936, Hitler had seen a prophecy of his own doom, even if he didn't realize it: just a few years after the Olympic games, young, earnest, talented Americans like the ones on the Olympic team would return to Berlin to hunt him down.

Throughout the book, Brown has suggested that the American team's victory at the 1936 Olympics challenged the supremacy of Hitler's Reich and prophesized the fall of Berlin in 1945. Though they might not have thought of themselves as crusaders against Hitler, Joe and the other rowers did, in a sense, fight Hitler by triumphing against a German team on Hitler's home turf.

The last "survivor" of the 1936 Olympic crew team is the **Husky Clipper** itself, the boat in which the Americans rowed. She's kept at the University of Washington, where she continues to inspire ambitious young rowers. To this day, Washington rowers maintain the highest GPAs of any athletic team on campus—they're expected to be models of discipline and success, both in and out of the classroom. Every year, as freshman try out for crew, the freshman coach makes the same speech about Washington crew's historic success, its rivalry with Cal, and its Olympic gold. Then, the coach points up at the *Husky Clipper* and "begins to tell the story."

The Husky Clipper "lives on" at the University of Washington, a poignant symbol of the great achievements of the university's greatest rowers. Washington still produces Olympic-caliber oarsmen who succeed in the classroom as well as on the water—a testament to the lasting influence of Al Ulbrickson and his crew program of the 1930s. Although relatively few Americans know about Joe Rantz and his teammates at the University of Washington, their achievements endure, an inspiration to anyone who's ever had to deal with insecurity, poverty, or loneliness.

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