

Sail on brother Jesse...

By Nyewusi Askari

Tonight is such an inadequate time for me. Another Black man is dead, trimmed, gone from this earth scene...and a cold, bitter, April rain beat against my kitchen window pane. Jesse. Jesse. Jesse.

April 1980; there is rain, I complain, but even a 1936 West German mud can't stop Jesse's feet from thrusting us into the select pages of World History.

Feet don't fail him now.
Jesse...a special Black man. Owens...a Black history maker, brought to me first by ABC. Something is very wrong here; a Black history maker on ABC racing against a horse!

Feet don't fail him now!
On this day, ABC is Hilter 1936, the horse is a 1936 German sprinter and we are 1936 fans cheering them on. How many are cheering for the horse? How many for Jesse?

Eenie meenie my-nee moe
You'll never catch Jesse by his toe
Feet don't fail him now!

Oh Allah! forgive me for my transgressions. For too many years, ABC/NBC/CBS educated me to dislike this great Black man. It was all about images; images of a Black history maker reduced to racing against horses, against commercials, against pale faced, dog eat dog TV directors, and people like me who thought the 60s educated us to pass logical judgement against those whose Blackness we considered null and void.

Allah! please let me know that you understand what I'm trying to express! What did I know? I didn't know anything about 1936, or what brother Jesse went through just to live through it all; Hilter, West Germany, and the thousands of whites who had been told by Hilter that Jesse and his kind were "Baboons" and the "dregs" of all humanity. I confess my ignorance.

Times were hard then as now, but much harder then. A Black man's chances of survival against the Hilters of the world were almost nil. So, what do I, a product of the 60s understand about Jesse, a product of 1936? We kill our heroes too easily with intellectual bullshit. I was born in 1945, but it took until the late 60s for me to even realize that I was Black. Brother Jesse knew it back in 1936.

All he wanted to do was run. All sister Rosie Parks wanted to do was sit at the front of the bus; brother H. Rap Brown just wanted justice; Martin wanted justice for all; sweet Jimmy Lee just wanted a job so he could provide for his family...Black history makers, tired of walking, tired of talking, tired of standing while others of a different color were allowed to sit; just wanted to be Black, understood and treated equally; just wanted to be known as dignified men and women and ended up being history makers. What do I know? I have yet to help write our history or do something worth remembering. Brother Jesse did both, on the up and down stroke.

He just wanted to run, have some fun and win Gold Medals. As he so often said, "at the time, I didn't know anything about politics." At least he was honest. It would have been hard for me to admit a lack of political insight. But, what do we really know about the politics of haters, when we spend so much time trying to love? I confess my ignorance. The politics of haters are the miseries of lovers of humanity and brother Jesse never defined himself otherwise. Nevertheless, me and others like myself, tried...oh how we tried! On any given day Jesse was this that and the other, but never a brother, never a history maker worth honoring. Allah forgive me for my transgressions.

To my parents, Jesse was the Muhammad Ali of 1936. A different kind of Ali, but a Ali all the same. He was the first Black man to whip Hilter. He didn't care about Hilter's madness, wasn't afraid of it at all, yet, here I am in 1980, experiencing deep fear whenever a police car drive slowdown past my house, in the night time. There is knowledge to be learned here.

Feet don't fail me now.

I see the sun now...feel strong...feel a strange breeze touching my face; feel love surging through my body; feel the need to claim this Black man and I will. I shall, from now on, honor our Black history makers, no matter the gap in time, no matter the difference in political paths. There is no way I could ever feel what brother Owens felt back in 1936 or in 1980. I will never really know the depth of his tribulations, his loneliness, or his yearning for a little understanding from brothers like myself.



Jesse Owens visits with Ernie Warren during Portland visit.

(Photo: Allan de Lay)

We must guard, protect and eventually come to guide our Black history makers when they reach the point in life where they are unable to do it themselves. We must not let the likes of ABC, NBC, and CBS steal

and reduce them to "things" we despise and dehumanize.

I learn from Black history and now I know that there can be no Black History without Black history makers. And altho the event took

place back in 1936, I am proud to have seen him alive in 1980. Now that's an honor worth writing and teaching about.

Sail on brother Jesse, sail on! We'll finish the race from here...



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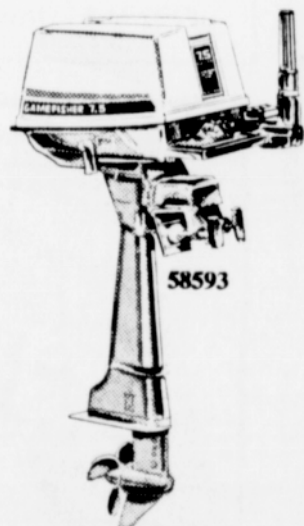
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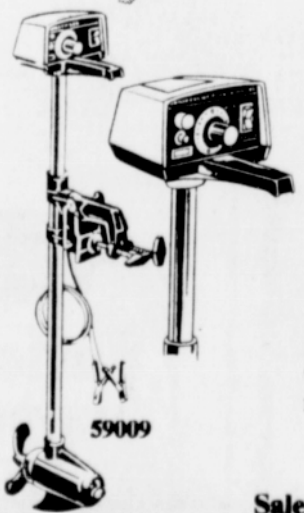
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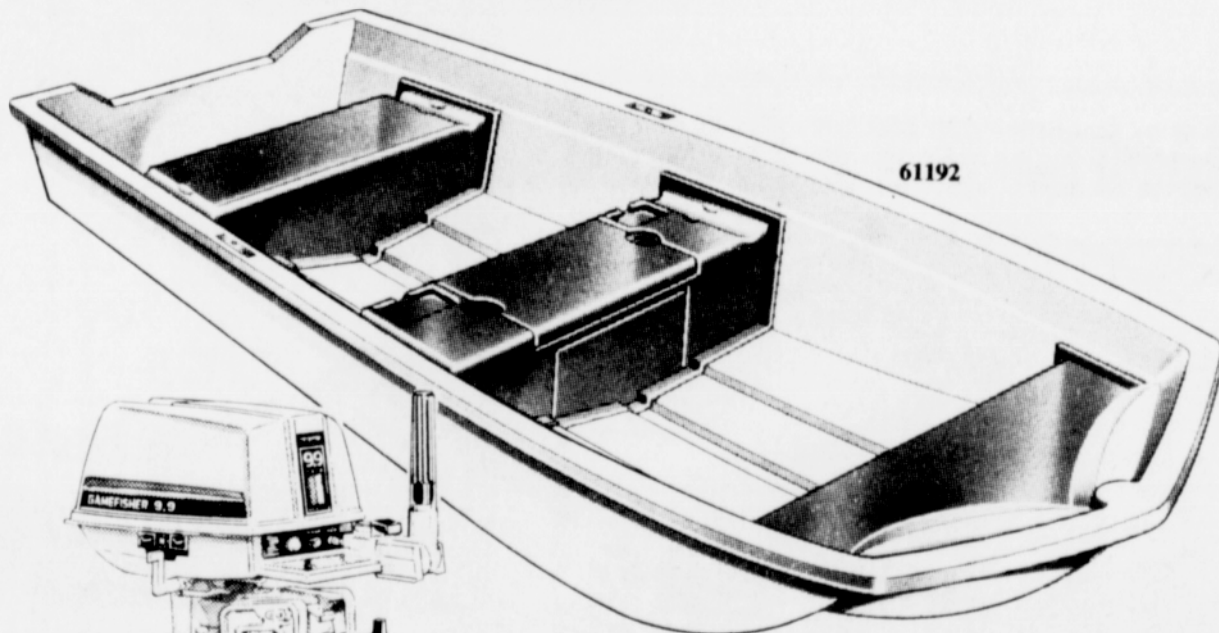
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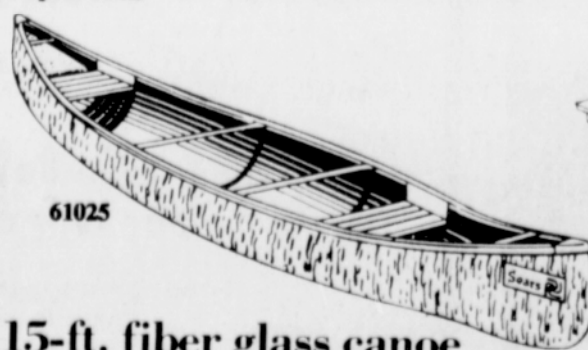


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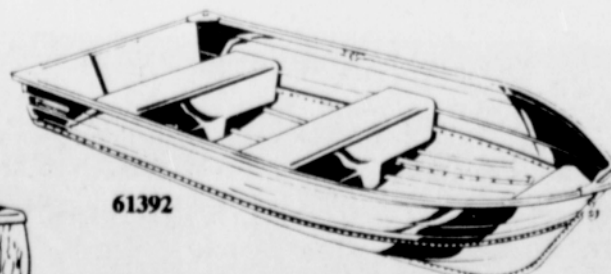


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