

We Will Never Turn Back

1936-1953

Unit Summary—During Franklin Roosevelt's terms of office, African Americans made great strides in nearly every aspect of society. Charismatic political leaders represented the interests of the African American community. Creative scientists devised new technologies that enhanced medicine. Gifted athletes showed their prowess in sporting arenas. As a worldwide audience watched, these African American athletes dispelled commonly held beliefs that one group of people were superior to another. In doing so, they became symbols of hope for the world's oppressed populations. (Chapter 41)

As it was in the past, African Americans reached great heights in spite of the racism that continued to choke American society. African American soldiers fighting in World War II had to combat both foreign enemies and discrimination from their comrades. These patriotic soldiers overcame both foes and achieved their goal of helping to rid the world of Hitler's regime of oppression. Ironically, upon returning home, the African American soldiers often found that similar oppression continued to exist in their homeland. Still undaunted, African Americans in the armed forces forged ahead, achieving desegregation in 1948, and soon after, distinguishing themselves once again in battle—this time, against communism in Korea. (Chapter 42)

UNIT 12

BEFORE YOU READ

A symbol is an item that represents a concept or idea. Our modern society is filled with many types of symbols. Religious communities, political groups, and even businesses often use symbols to represent their beliefs or products. Such symbols are designed for that distinct purpose.

Other items become symbols by association. If a grandparent gave you a watch he or she once wore, you would associate the watch with that family member. The watch, however, was not originally created as a symbol. It simply became one due to your experiences and association.

In this unit, you will discover how the actions of extraordinary African Americans caused them to become symbols in American society.

1942
Dorie Miller receives the Navy Cross for distinguished duty at Pearl Harbor.

1942
Many African soldiers were among the engineer units who built the Alcan Highway.

1944
Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., is elected to Congress from Harlem, becoming the first African American congressman from the eastern states.

1948
President Harry Truman issues Executive Order 9981 desegregating the Armed Forces on July 26.

1950
The Army's oldest African American infantry regiment attacked and drove the Korean Army out of Yechon on July 20, marking the first battle of the Korean War won by an American unit.

1942
The Navy and Marine Corps accept African Americans.

1944
Allied forces invade Normandy.

1945

1945
Nuremberg trials for Nazi war criminals begin.

1946
First Meeting of UN General Assembly takes place in London.

1948

1948
Israel becomes a state.

1949
A truce ends the war between Israel and the Arab League in the Middle East.

1953

1953
The Korean War ends.

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AS YOU READ

- How did Eleanor Roosevelt's actions demonstrate her belief in equality?
- Why was Jesse Owens called "the world's fastest human"?
- How did Joe Louis knock out Nazi propaganda?
- What effect did Charles Drew have on modern medicine?
- Whose interests did Adam Clayton Powell represent in the U.S. Congress?

Chapter Outline

- The Final Years of Roosevelt's New Deal
- Jesse Owens Wins Four Gold Medals
- Joe Louis Becomes Heavyweight Boxing Champion
- Charles Drew Organizes the First Blood Bank
- Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., Elected to Congress from Harlem

Vocabulary

- Aryan superiority • protest demonstrations • Powell Amendment
- censured • charismatic leader

The Final Years of Roosevelt's New Deal

Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration was the first to deliberately seek to include African Americans in the federal government. Many African Americans gave Roosevelt credit for economic gains during the 1930s. Roosevelt had risked little personally for the African American community, but members of his administration and his wife, Eleanor, are remembered for heroic policy efforts on their behalf.

Harold Ickes, the Secretary of the Interior, was an important decision-maker in Roosevelt's administration. He appointed William H. Hastie and Robert C. Weaver to significant positions as advisors in his department. Both of these African Americans went on to become important figures in the government. Hastie became a judge and Weaver became the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development under President Lyndon B. Johnson in the 1960s.

1936

President Roosevelt is re-elected in a landslide win with 75% of the African American vote.

1936

Track star Jesse Owens wins four gold medals at the Olympics in Berlin.

1937

Joe Louis, the "Brown Bomber" becomes the Heavyweight champion of the World.

1939

Dr. Charles Drew perfects blood plasma to facilitate transfusions.

1939

Marian Anderson receives the Spingarn Medal.

1944

Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. is elected to Congress.



President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, above, created government programs that were so helpful to African Americans that they became predominantly Democratic after decades of loyalty to the Republican Party.

Roosevelt's wife, Eleanor, carried out numerous public actions of her own on behalf of African American equality. She resigned from the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) when, in 1939, that organization denied African American singer Marian Anderson the use of Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C. for a concert. Years later, officials of the DAR explained that Anderson's race had nothing to do with her cancellation; rather they claimed that there was a conflict in scheduling. In 1939, when the NAACP awarded the Spingarn Medal to Ms. Anderson, the First Lady was the one who handed it to her.

Anderson would go on to achieve wide acclaim in Europe, where she sang spirituals and arias (solos) from famous operas. On January 7, 1955, she became the first African American singer to perform at the Metropolitan Opera Company in New York City.

President Roosevelt won re-election in 1936 and 1940 by a wide margin because so many African Americans gave him their vote. Roosevelt's New Deal had greatly helped African Americans survive the Great Depression, and they returned the favor by giving him 75 percent of their votes in the 1936 election. By that time, African Americans held the balance of power in ten northern states, which meant that the candidate who received the majority of African American votes in those states would win the election. As the New Deal drew to a close, African Americans not only held the balance of power in elections in the North, they were also setting records in sports and making history in medicine. Soon they would be winning political seats themselves.

Jesse Owens Wins Four Gold Medals

While Roosevelt was winning political races with the help of the African American vote, Jesse Owens was out-running and out-jumping his opponents in track and field.

DID YOU KNOW ?

In one day, May 25, 1935, Jesse Owens equaled or broke several world records as a member of the Ohio State University track team in a meet at the University of Michigan. He equaled the world record for the 100-yard dash and broke the world records for the 220-yard dash, the 220-yard low hurdles, and the running broad jump (or long jump). No one beat his broad jump record for 25 years.

After he retired from athletics, he made goodwill tours to foreign countries for the U.S. State Department, worked in public relations, and served as Secretary of the Illinois Athletic Commission.

Owens published his autobiography *The Jesse Owens Story* in 1970.



Jesse Owens, center, won four gold medals at the 1936 Summer Olympic Games in Berlin, Germany. His victories thwarted German dictator Adolf Hitler's plans to prove Aryan superiority at the games.

Jesse Owens, one of eight children, was born September 12, 1913, on an Alabama farm, one of eight children, to poor sharecropping parents. The family moved to Cleveland, Ohio, where Owens attended public schools. He started running track at an early age and won numerous awards.

Following a remarkable high school career, Owens entered Ohio State University. In a meet in Chicago on June 18, 1933, he equaled the world record in the 100-yard dash and broke world records for the 220-yard low hurdles, the 220-yard dash, and the broad jump. By 1936, he had set several new national records and had become the captain of the track team—the first African American to hold such a position on any Ohio State team. He won a place on the 1936 American Olympic team by winning the 200-yard dash, as well as qualifying in two other events.

In 1936, Germany hosted the Olympics in Berlin using the games as an opportunity to

demonstrate the superior skills of the German people. Owens made history by winning four gold medals, as Adolf Hitler, the leader of the Nazi regime, looked on. He ran the 100-yard dash in 10.3 seconds, tying the world record. He jumped 26 feet, 5¼ inches in the long jump, setting an Olympic record. He ran the 200-yard dash in 20.7 seconds, setting another Olympic record. He also ran the first leg for the 400-yard relay team, which finished first with a time of 39.8 seconds, setting both an Olympic and world record.

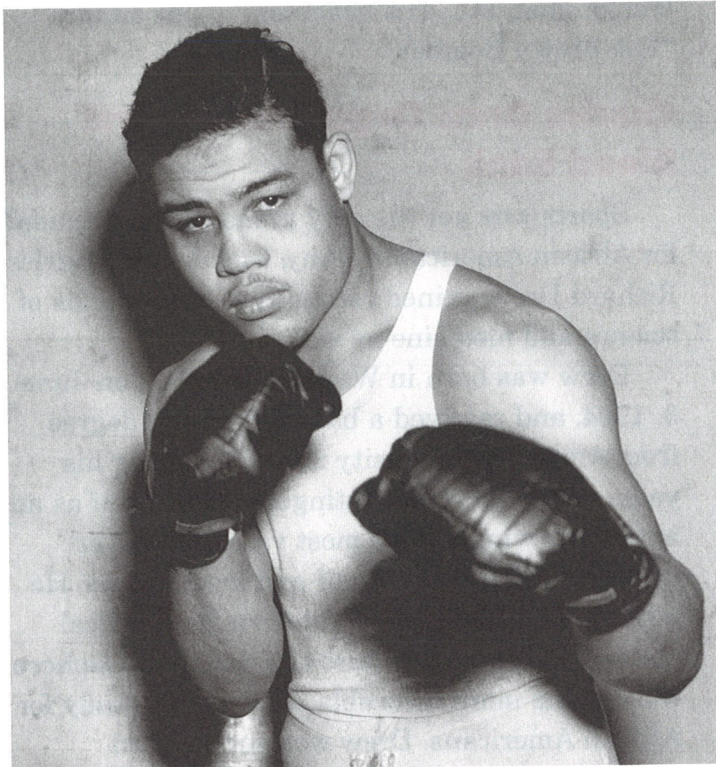
Owens returned to the United States aboard the *Queen Mary* to a hero's welcome from people of all races, colors, and nationalities. They thronged to the pier to see the "world's fastest human." More than a thousand people secured passes to board the *Queen Mary* before she docked—the largest number ever to apply for passes to the ship.

Scores of photographers and journalists came along with friends and promoters to see and hear what the great African American athlete had to say to the crowds. He was friendly toward the onlookers, and showed great confidence. When he came down the gangplank with his parents and his wife, the crowd went wild with cheers. Later at the home of Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, the actor and dancer, Owens expressed his dislike of prejudice and racism:

"After all, since we are all Americans, Negroes should have a chance in every sport. Certainly the showing of Negroes in track events shows that if they have half a chance, they produce the goods."

Joe Louis Becomes Heavyweight Boxing Champion

Another outstanding African American athlete of the era was the great boxer Joe Louis. Like Owens, Joe Louis Barrow was born in rural



Heavyweight boxer Joe Louis, delivered a knock out punch to the Aryan superiority myth when he defeated German boxer Max Schmeling in 1938.

"I don't want nobody to call me champ until I beat Schmeling."

Louis instituted a "bum of the month" campaign in which he would take on any fighter who thought he had a chance against the champion. On June 22, 1938, he once again fought Max Schmeling, who was the only boxer who had defeated him up to that time. The German fighter stood as one of his countries most prominent symbols of **Aryan superiority**. According to Hitler and his followers, Aryans were the master race made up of Caucasians (excluding Jews and other non-Germanic ethnic groups) with especially keen features. When Louis knocked out the German within two minutes and four seconds of the first round—two powerful left hooks—he became the darling of the American people. He had gained a victory not just for himself but also for the entire African American population. He had proved that Aryan superiority was nothing more than a myth.

In 1937, Louis had started a 12-year reign as world champion. During his career, he defended his title 25 times—a record that was never broken. In 1949, after defeating Jersey Joe Walcott twice, Louis retired as the undefeated champion. He had earned \$5 million in his boxing career, but he gave away much of his money to charity and the U.S. army and naval

DID YOU KNOW ?

Joe Louis was a "knockout fighter" even as an amateur. Forty-three of his amateur bouts were won by a knockout. He also knocked out six world champions, including James Braddock and Max Schmeling, and when he defended his world heavyweight title 25 times, this was more times than the preceding eight champions put together. He also served in the Army during World War II, and fought exhibition matches to entertain the troops.

Alabama, on May 13, 1914. His family moved to Detroit in 1924 and he became the Golden Gloves light heavyweight champion 10 years later. The following year he turned professional and fought 12 bouts, winning each one. In June of 1935 he fought Primo Carnera, a former heavyweight champion. At 6'6", and weighing more than 300 pounds, Carnera was one of the largest fighters in ring history. Before a crowd of 62,000 spectators in New York's Yankee Stadium, Louis defeated Carnera. He went on to fame by defeating Max Baer with a knockout in the fourth round.

Louis seemed impossible to beat. He met Max Schmeling, the German heavyweight, on June 19, 1936, just as Hitler's war machine was building strength. Schmeling defeated Louis in a loss that would sting long after his bruises were healed. Louis was counted out in the 12th round and suffered the first and most painful defeat of his career. In 1937, he whipped, James Braddock, world heavyweight champion but he said:



Dr. Charles Drew, developed a technique for preserving blood that ranked him near the top of medical history in the 20th century.

relief funds. In 1950, financial pressures (especially back taxes owed to the government) forced him into retirement after he fought and was defeated by Ezzard Charles. Although it was true that Louis had been delinquent in paying his taxes, many African Americans believed that the government was too severe in its punishment for an athlete who had given so much to bolster America's pride and prestige. He attempted once again to bounce back in a fight against heavyweight contender Rocky Marciano and was knocked through the ropes in the eighth round in a second defeat.

When Joe Louis retired from the ring again at 37 years of age, he did not have a cent to show for all the fights he had won. To earn a living, he became a celebrity host—a uniformed doorman of sorts, greeting guests as they entered a Las Vegas casino.

Joe Louis and his career remain a high point in a violent profession. He was a decent man, an industrious man, and a gentleman who made a mark on the boxing world through his great skill. After his death in 1981, he was buried in Arlington National Cemetery outside

Washington, D.C. His headstone reads simply, "The Brown Bomber."

Charles Drew Organizes the First Blood Bank

Sports was not the only arena of achievement for African Americans. Many, such as Dr. Charles Richard Drew, gained recognition in the fields of science and medicine as well.

Drew was born in Washington, D.C., on June 3, 1904, and received a bachelor of arts degree from Amherst University in 1926. During his years at Amherst, he distinguished himself as an athlete by winning the most valuable player trophy on both the football and track teams. He left the United States to continue his medical training in Canada, where the racial atmosphere was a little more favorable to academic study for African Americans. Drew was such a good student that he received both an M.D. and a master's in surgery from McGill University in Montreal in 1933. In 1936, he accepted a position at Howard University as an instructor in pathology. He later became an assistant in surgery. He was then ready to tackle scientific education at Columbia University, where he eventually received his Ph.D. in medicine in 1940.

Throughout this period, Drew had received various honors and was often called in as a medical or scientific consultant by medical institutions and governments. He was asked by the British government to establish a military blood bank program to collect blood for the British army on the eve of its entry into World War II. Having graduated from a Canadian college, Drew was well received by the British, since Canada was a member of the British Commonwealth. His research centered on the transfusion of plasma-clear sterilized blood fluid, which has the red and white blood cells removed. Drew discovered that plasma could be preserved and stored for longer periods of time than could

whole blood. The system worked so well that the British asked him to start the world's first mass blood bank project in 1939.

In 1941, the American government appointed him to direct the American Red Cross blood bank. Drew resigned that post soon after the war department sent out a letter stating that blood drawn from white donors should not be mixed with blood drawn from African Americans donors. Drew said,

"The blood of individual humans may differ by blood groupings, but there is absolutely no scientific basis to indicate any difference in human blood from race to race."

Drew was made professor of surgery at Howard University and chief surgeon for Freedmen Hospital in 1942. In 1944, he became the chief of staff of Freedmen Hospital and received the Spingarn Medal from the NAACP for his scientific work.

On April 1, 1950, Drew was involved in an automobile accident in rural North Carolina while he was driving to a medical meeting at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Unfounded rumors spread almost immediately that the man who had helped create the first American Red Cross blood bank and who had developed techniques for preserving blood had bled to death because a whites-only hospital had refused to treat him. Drew was in fact treated in the emergency room of a small, segregated hospital—the Alamance General Hospital. Two white surgeons worked on him for an hour before he died.

Dr. Charles Drew was an industrious and ambitious educator, as well as an exceptional scientist in the 1940s and 1950s. He is an

outstanding example of the many African American scientists who made a lasting impact on society. In 1981, the United States issued a stamp in his honor.

Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., Elected to Congress from Harlem

The political power of African Americans continued to grow in the big northern cities. By 1954, for the first time in the 20th century, three African Americans held seats in the House of Representatives. They were William Dawson of Chicago, Charles C. Diggs of Detroit, and the Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. of New York.

Powell was born in New Haven, Connecticut on November 29, 1908. At an early age, he moved with his parents to New York City, where his father became minister of the prestigious Abyssinian Baptist Church. Powell graduated from Colgate University in 1930 and received a



Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., the charismatic and outstanding congressman from Harlem, New York, fought fearlessly for African American equality.



Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., left, and Martin Luther King, Jr., two civil rights leaders with different techniques.

masters degree in religious education from Columbia University in 1931.

The young Powell quickly assumed social leadership in the African American community during the 1930s. He organized picket lines and mass meetings to demand reforms at Harlem Hospital, which had dismissed five African American doctors from its staff because of their race. Powell found this to be unacceptable and decided to actively lead **protest demonstrations** outside the hospital. This made him enormously popular in the African American community and he became an instant political figure. All through the Depression era, Powell used the tactics of rent strikes, mass meetings, public information campaigns, and picketing as a means to force restaurants, retail stores, bus lines, utilities and telephone companies, and the 1939 World's Fair to either hire or promote African American employees. He succeeded his father as pastor of the Abyssinian Baptist Church in 1936 and was then elected to the City Council of New York in 1941. In 1944, he was elected to Congress as a

representative from Harlem and became the first African American congressman from the eastern states. When Congressman Powell arrived in Washington, African American representatives were not allowed to use the Capitol's facilities that were reserved for members only. Powell challenged that regulation and other regulations that enforced a "whites only" policy. He took his African American constituents to dine with him in the "whites only" House restaurant and ordered his staff to eat there whether they

were hungry or not.

Powell introduced legislation to outlaw lynching; the poll tax; and discrimination in the Armed Forces, housing, employment, and transportation. This caused an immediate clash with one of the House's most ardent segregationists—John E. Rankin of Mississippi. Rankin opposed Powell on every piece of legislation, but Powell would not be denied. He attacked racism whenever he could and by any means possible. He attached anti-discrimination clauses to so many pieces of legislation that each instance of the riders became known as the **Powell Amendment**.

In the Democratic Party, Powell was known as an independent thinker who followed his own conscience. He managed to remain politically independent when it came to defending the interests of the African American community. He supported Republican Dwight Eisenhower for reelection in 1956, charging that the Democratic Party's platform was weak on civil rights. Two years later he was under fire for tax evasion. In the same year, 1958, the New York Tammany Hall political machine failed to oust him from

the Democratic primary. Each time the white establishment tried to defeat Powell, he gained more power with the African American community.

In 1961, because of his seniority, Powell he became the chairman of the Committee on Education and Labor and began the most productive period of his political career. The Committee approved more than 50 measures authorizing federal programs for minimum wage increases, education and training for the deaf, school lunches, vocational training, student loans, and new standards for wages and work hours. The committee also authorized programs to aid elementary and secondary schools, as well as public libraries. By the middle of the decade, Powell was under fire from his old enemies and members of his committee, who expressed frustration at his irregular management of the budget, his frequent travels abroad, and his self-imposed exile from his district, where his refusal to pay a slander judgment had made him subject to arrest. Southern white members of Congress felt he was too "uppity" and arrogant for an African American, because he never apologized for his actions.

On January 9, 1967, the House Democratic Caucus stripped Powell of his committee chairmanship. The full House refused to seat him until completion of an investigation by the Judiciary Committee. That committee recommended that he be **censured**, fined, and deprived of seniority. The House rejected these

proposals and voted instead to exclude him from the 90th Congress. Several civil rights leaders stepped forward to defend Powell, claiming that if he were white he would have been censured, not expelled. As an example, they cited the case of Senator Christopher Dodd of Connecticut, who was accused of misuse of funds and subsequently censured. The Supreme Court eventually ruled that the House had acted unconstitutionally in barring him from the 90th Congress.

Powell won a special election on April 11, 1967 to fill the vacancy caused by his exclusion, but did not take his seat. Eventually, he was reelected to a 12th term in the regular November contest, but the House voted to deny him his seniority. Powell declined to take his seat when the 91st Congress met in 1969. He returned to his seat, but without his 22 years of seniority. Charles Rangel defeated Powell in 1970. Powell died in Miami on April 4, 1972.

By the time of his death, Powell had left a lasting legacy on African American politics. He was a **charismatic leader**, one with powerful emotional appeal, whose magnetic influence gained loyal supporters who stood beside him on many social and political fronts. The Harlem congressman had become the spokesman for all of the disenfranchised African Americans in the South. He spoke for the masses of voiceless people who suffered daily indignities.

In that sense, he was truly the African Americans' congressman.

A PROVOCATIVE INDIVIDUAL

Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. was provocative in many ways throughout his life. He was light-skinned enough that as a young man, he passed as a white. When he let it be known that he was African American, both the whites and other African Americans he knew were angered at the deception.

When he was asked by the *New York Post* to comment on the Harlem Riot of 1935 in the newspaper, he responded so scathingly on discrimination and police

brutality that he soon was given the opportunity to write a regular "Soap Box" column.

In his first year as a New York congressman in Washington, he denounced First Lady Bess Truman for being affiliated with the Daughters of the American Revolution, which had discriminatory policies. As a result, he enraged President Harry Truman. In the 1956 presidential election, he angered his party by criticizing the Democrats' lukewarm support for civil rights.



Chapter 41 After You Read

Read each section carefully, then write your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

Comprehension Review

1. Why did Eleanor Roosevelt resign from the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR)?
2. What affect did African American voters have on the presidential elections of 1936 and 1940?
3. Why did Charles Drew decide to pursue medical training in a foreign country?
4. What significant medical discovery is Charles Drew noted for?
5. What message did the German government hope to send by hosting the 1936 Olympic games?
6. What political milestone made 1954 a significant year for African Americans?
7. In his fight to get anti-racist legislation passed in Congress, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. encountered fervent opposition from what segregationist Representative?
8. Though a Democrat, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. was an independent thinker. Cite one incident that shows his willingness to go against his own party.
9. As a Congressman, what section of New York City did Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. represent? How did southern African Americans regard him?

Center Your Thinking

10. Sports, in addition to revealing physical and spiritual strength, can have political resonance.
 - a. Name two reasons why Jesse Owens's accomplishment in the 1936 Olympics was so significant.
 - b. What two fights of Joe Louis had similar significance in the realm of international politics?
 - c. Owens and Louis both represented America when they accomplished their feats. At the same time, they were representing African Americans. Write an essay in which you discuss the irony they must have felt as they brought glory to a country that didn't grant their race full citizenship rights—a country that may, at times, have embraced them but only because of their athletic ability.

Vocabulary and Concept Development

1. What does the author mean by the statement "Schmeling defeated Louis in a loss that would sting long after his bruises were healed."?
2. How did the actions of Joe Louis show that the concept of **Aryan superiority** was false?
3. What is the meaning of the term *constituents* in the sentence "Powell took his African American constituents to dine with him in the 'whites only' House restaurant."?
4. Why does the author describe Adam Clayton Powell as a **charismatic leader**?