

1. Mark your confusion.
2. Show evidence of a close reading.
3. Write a 1+ page reflection.

## **Boycotting the 2022 Olympics**

*Human rights activists are calling for the U.S. to boycott the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing. Will that happen? Here's everything you need to know:*

*Source: TheWeek.com, May 23, 2021*

### **Why is China hosting?**

In a controversial decision, the International Olympic Committee voted 44 to 40 in 2015 to award the 2022 Winter Olympics to China. China won partly because a number of cities had withdrawn from the bidding, including Stockholm, Sweden, and Oslo, Norway, citing the costs and lack of interest by their citizens. Beijing views its selection as a major opportunity to promote China's image as a world power rivaling the U.S. But activists are calling for the U.S. to lead a boycott of the competition. The outcry stems primarily from China's treatment of the Muslim Uighur minority, which the Trump and Biden administrations have labeled as genocide. Since 2017, an estimated 1 million Uighurs in the western Xinjiang region have been detained without trial in indoctrination camps. Men and women have been subjected to horrific abuses, including torture, rape, forced labor, sterilization, and political indoctrination, with demands they abandon their Muslim religion. Human Rights Watch has denounced China's treatment of the Uighurs as "crimes against humanity." Tensions have also ratcheted up over recent Chinese cyberattacks on the U.S., crackdowns on pro-democracy activists in Hong Kong, and aggression against Taiwan. The Chinese government has warned of a "robust response" if Washington opts to boycott.

### **Have there been previous Olympics boycotts?**

They are actually not that uncommon. In 1956, several nations skipped the games in response to the Soviet Union's actions in Hungary, while Egypt, Iraq, and Lebanon boycotted the Summer Games in Melbourne, Australia, because of British and French involvement in the Suez Crisis. In 1958, six years after it sent its first Olympic delegation, the People's Republic of China withdrew from the IOC following the committee's decision to let Chinese and Taiwanese athletes compete under separate flags. China continued to boycott the Games until 1980, the same year that the U.S. and 65 other countries boycotted the Summer Games in Moscow.

### **Why did the U.S. boycott in 1980?**

President Jimmy Carter called for a boycott of the Moscow Games in response to the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan that winter. Public support for the boycott eroded after the U.S. hosted the 1980 Winter Games at Lake Placid, New York, and its men's hockey team famously upset the Soviets on the way to claiming the gold medal. That victory buttressed the argument that it would prove more embarrassing to Moscow for the U.S. to compete against the Russians and beat them. But in the end, 65 nations boycotted, including the U.S. team. In retaliation, the Soviets sat out the 1984 Summer Games in Los Angeles.

### **Who supports a boycott in 2022?**

More than 180 human rights groups are leading the calls to skip the event over China's aggressive actions against Tibet, Taiwan, the Uighur community, and Hong Kong. A survey by the Chicago Council in March found that 49 percent of Americans support a boycott, with 46 percent opposed. Sen. Mitt Romney (R-Utah), who was president of the 2002 Salt Lake City Games, has called a boycott the "easy, but wrong, answer." Romney said that "our athletes have trained their entire lives for this competition" and they shouldn't be the ones to "shoulder the burden of our disapproval."

### **What is President Biden's position?**

A State Department spokesman said last month that a boycott was "something that we certainly wish to

discuss" — but the department later walked back those remarks. White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said that "we are not discussing" a boycott with allies. The U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee has also urged the U.S. not to hold out, saying "the more effective course of action" would be to engage China directly on human rights issues. Not surprisingly, most athletes want to compete, and IOC President Thomas Bach said history shows that boycotts never achieve anything. "Why would you punish the athletes from your own country if you have a dispute with a government from another country?" Bach said. But U.S. skiing star Mikaela Shiffrin criticized the IOC for giving China the opportunity to host "an event that's supposed to bring the world together and create hope and peace."

### **Are there alternatives?**

If the U.S. still decides to send its athletes, corporations that normally sponsor the Olympics could pull their support. The top American sponsors, including Airbnb, Coca-Cola, General Electric, and Visa, collectively pay over \$1 billion for exclusive rights to include the Olympic rings in their promotions. Some opponents of a boycott argue that athletes could use the world stage to raise awareness about China's human rights abuses. Sprinters John Carlos and Tommie Smith created one of the most powerful images in Olympic history by raising their fists in a Black Power salute on the medal stand in 1968. If American athletes go to Beijing, it's possible we could see something just as memorable.

### **Echoes of 1936**

The present debate about China's rising aggression is drawing comparisons to one of the darkest chapters in Olympic history. Three years before the onset of World War II, Berlin hosted the 1936 Summer Olympics. There were some calls for a boycott because of reports of the Nazi government's plan to ban German Jewish athletes and its increasingly hostile treatment of Jews. Ultimately, the U.S. Olympic Committee and 49 competing countries decided to send their athletes. The Games themselves featured the spectacular success of Black track star Jesse Owens, who won four gold medals in an embarrassing rebuke of Hitler's "master race" theory. Nonetheless, Hitler used the Games as a platform to promote Nazi Germany as a world power. At the start of the Games, Hitler's minister of propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, stated, "We desire in these weeks to prove to the world that it is simply a lie that Germans have systematically persecuted the Jews." The IOC subsequently awarded the 1940 Winter Games to Germany, but by then, Hitler had invaded Poland, World War II had begun, and the Games were canceled.

### **Possible Response Questions:**

- What are your thoughts about boycotting the Olympics? Explain.
- Did something in this article surprise you? Explain.
- Pick a word/line/passage from the article and respond to it.
- Discuss a "move" made by the writer in this piece that you think is good/interesting. Explain.