2013

“Our Best Bet is the Boy”: A Cultural History of Bicycle Marketing and Consumption in the United States, 1880-1960

Robert J. Turpin
University of Kentucky, rjturpin@gmail.com

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Robert J. Turpin, Student

Dr. Tracy Campbell, Major Professor

Dr. David Hamilton, Director of Graduate Studies
“OUR BEST BET IS THE BOY”: A CULTURAL HISTORY OF BICYCLE MARKETING AND CONSUMPTION IN THE UNITED STATES, 1880-1960

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Arts & Sciences at the University of Kentucky

By
Robert J. Turpin
Campbellsville, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Tracy Campbell, Professor of History
Lexington, Kentucky

2013
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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

“OUR BEST BET IS THE BOY”: A CULTURAL HISTORY OF BICYCLE MARKETING AND CONSUMPTION IN THE UNITED STATES, 1880-1960

This dissertation will focus on how the bicycle industry dealt with a period of dwindling popularity for their product how the bicycle found redemption—as a child’s toy. The central question that will serve as the driving force of this dissertation is: Why did Americans lose interest in cycling and what can this tell us about American culture and societal ideals? By examining industry practices and American consumption of the bicycle, this dissertation will seek to understand this question by mapping changes in American culture that occurred from the 1880s-1960. It examines why Americans lost interest in cycling and what this tells us about American culture and American’s self-perceptions, as individuals and as a nation. It interrogates how Americans used the bicycle to demonstrate ideals of race, class, age, and gender and how the bicycle’s role as a status symbol changed over time. This study also considers how larger historic changes, such as urbanization, suburbanization, changes in the economy, war, and political decisions regarding the built environment affected cycling. Shifts in social and cultural norms instigated changes in the symbolic nature of the bicycle and the public’s use of it to attain and affirm socially constructed ideals. Attempts to manage the image of the bicycle in reaction to cultural changes—as well as the societal contestations and negotiations arising in response to those attempts, what they teach us, and how those lessons can be applied in a contemporary setting—drive this dissertation. This examination of cycling in the U.S. will argue that the manner in which the bicycle was marketed and designed as well as the manner in which it was consumed both relate directly to alterations in American culture. As bicycle production increased and prices fell the bicycle lost the interest of its target market—white middle-class males—and manufacturers began a series of attempts at redefining the bicycle and broadening its market. By arguing that the bicycle industry itself was culpable in the bicycle’s loss of status, this dissertation will go beyond overly simplistic arguments that fail to look beyond automobiles.
KEYWORDS: Bicycles, Consumerism, Childhood, Advertising, Mobility
“OUR BEST BET IS THE BOY”: A CULTURAL HISTORY OF BICYCLE MARKETING AND CONSUMPTION IN THE UNITED STATES, 1880-1960

BY

Robert J. Turpin

Dr. Tracy A. Campbell
Director of Dissertation

Dr. David E. Hamilton
Director of Graduate Studies

December 13, 2013
Date
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project may have never been born without the influence of Christopher Thompson and suggestions from Drs. Jeremy Popkin and Ronald Eller. Thompson’s book, The Tour De France: A Cultural History, demonstrated that a study of cycling could make a very important contribution to our understanding of culture. Jeremy Popkin offhandedly suggested a cultural history of the bicycle in the United States as my dissertation project and Ronald Eller encouraged me to examine manhood and the bicycle. He has been a supportive and insightful committee member ever since. The sources I found while researching manhood and cycling led me to the current project, which examines the shift in bicycle marketing to boys.

While I have often felt alone on this project, it could not have been completed without criticism, suggestions, and support from my committee. It is impossible to explain the extent to which they helped me clarify and develop my arguments. This work has benefited from their input but I alone am responsible for any deficiencies that remain. Members of my committee both encouraged and challenged me. Drs. Tracy Campbell, Karen Petrone, and David Hamilton all took the time to read and comment (extensively) on earlier drafts. Tracy Campbell pushed me to situate my work within larger historic developments and to diversify my sources. Karen Petrone was very generous with her time, allowing me talk through outlines of each chapter. She also provided comments that helped me refine my discussion of issues of class and gender. David Hamilton came to my aid by offering insights into economic and business issues of the era. He also suggested many helpful works on consumerism and childhood. All three made valuable
comments and suggestions to strengthen my writing and organization. Harald Höbusch was always willing to talk about my progress and gave enthusiastic support of the project along the way. David Herlihy was very kind to answer my random questions about old bicycles via email and in person. The conversations we had affirmed my findings and kept me motivated. This project also benefited from my peers who gave helpful comments and advice. Cat Richards was crucial in helping me getting the first chapters on paper. Mandy Higgins, Anthony Miller, Robert Murray and James Savage all read early drafts and provided supportive conversation along the way.

I could not have afforded to do all the research this project required without the benefit of the George C. Herring Research Fellowship, graduate funding from the University of Kentucky Graduate School. The staff at the Benson Ford Research Center kindly allowed me to spend several days pouring over their materials. Annette Thompson at the Bicycle Museum of America granted me unimpeded access to their materials, many of which were crucial to my later chapters. This project also benefited from the Roberta Park Fellowship and a graduate scholar award, both of which allowed me to present my research at conferences of the North American Society for Sport History and the International Conference on Sport and Society respectively. I am indebted to those that offered support by opening up their homes such as Kate Hensler, Lydia Hensler, Andrew Yates, Eric Johnson, and Joseph Dees. They made my trips to New York, Chicago, and Cincinnati much more affordable and comfortable. I am also grateful for Joan Auerbach’s generosity in letting me borrow her father’s—former president of the Bicycle Institute of America—materials.
I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to say God bless the librarians. There have been countless librarians to assist me and many more who tried their best to help me find pertinent materials. Jens Arneson at Eastern Kentucky University’s Crabbe Library went out of his way to provide me with books and websites containing relevant information. Shawn Livingston at the University of Kentucky’s William T. Young library provided instruction, encouragement, and helped resolve any issues I had finding or accessing resources. Finally, without question, the most helpful librarian has been my wife. Not only did she help me learn to do research, she also worked full time while I sat at home in my pajamas staring at a computer screen. She has lived with this project just as much as I have. When it kept me awake at night, it kept her awake as well. She has been both understanding and helpful in conversations we have had about the challenges of such a project. Unfortunately for her, just because this stage has come to a close does not mean she has heard the last of me ranting and raving about bicycles.

I am grateful for the support of my family, including my brother who I think was secretly racing me to see if he could finish his dissertation first or maybe it is the other way around. I am thankful for my mother-in-law and father-in-law, who continually asked me about my progress, which was a blessing and a curse. I am lucky to have a mother and father who have both been patient and understanding while I have spent a majority of my life in school. Even though they had not attended college themselves, they taught me the value of education and inspired my pursuit of knowledge.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Much is revealed by the movement and consumer patterns of a nation’s citizenry. This study, while focusing on the bicycle industry, offers a window into broader aspects of American culture. The changes bicycles and cycling experienced in the United States from 1880-1960 were symptomatic of larger changes in ideals of gender, mobility, and consumerism among the middle-class. First introduced to Americans in the 1830s but not popularized until the 1890s, the bicycle continued to evolve during industrialization, urbanization, segregation, temperance, mass consumption, and suburbanization. All of these developments left marks that contributed to alterations in the symbolic nature of the bicycle and the ways in which Americans consumed it.¹

Bicycles began as hobby-horses—a crude version consisting of two wheels connected by a board that the rider would straddle and propel by pushing off of the ground with his feet. Subsequent versions of the bicycle would be lauded as superior to horses, whereas the hobby-horse was a toy substitute for the horse. The high-wheel was the next major development in cycling and by the 1870s it was a relatively common sight in the United States.² This design of bicycle is powered by the directly-driven axle of a massive front wheel. The ordinary was appealing because it was more efficient and could achieve higher speeds than the hobby-horse. In 1878, Col. Albert A. Pope, owner of the Pope Manufacturing Company, was first to begin producing high wheelers (or

¹ Consumption applies to not only the purchase of bicycles, but also usage.
ordinaries) in the United States. There were other versions of the bicycle but the ordinary was the most common style until the rise of the “safety” bicycle in the late 1880s.

First produced in the mid-1880s, the safety bicycle was the basis for the most common model of bicycle seen today. It incorporated a triangular frame with two wheels of equal circumference that were propelled by the rear wheel, which was driven by chain. This allowed for various gear ratios that could lead to greater efficiency and ultimately, faster speeds. Because the safety bicycle was relatively easy to ride and less dangerous, cycling soon became a popular form of recreation. By 1893, there were close to one million bicycle owners in the United States, a number that more than double by 1896. At that time, the U.S. cycling industry was experiencing a major boom, which peaked in 1899 with a total output of 1.11 million bicycles produced domestically. With the standardization of frame design that came with the invention of the safety bicycle and the recognition by entrepreneurs that bicycles were en vogue, bicycle manufacturers and consumers became so ubiquitous that the act of cycling was no longer extraordinary and the bicycle was no longer a consumer item exclusively for the upper class.

The independence bicycles granted was important, particularly because they differed from horses in cost and upkeep. The expense of the bicycle resulted in its ability

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4 It was called the “safety” because it was safe compared to the ordinary, which was prone to “headers”—throwing the rider over the handlebars when its large front wheel was forced to a sudden stop by potholes or debris.


to denote class. Not only did early cyclists demonstrate their wealth through the purchases they made, but also by participating in a leisure activity. As the bicycle became more affordable, it became more popular, particularly among the middle-class. Shortly thereafter, entrepreneurs flocked to the cycling industry and, in turn, bicycle production in the U.S. skyrocketed. The resulting competition between companies drove prices downward. By 1896, there were close to 250 bicycle factories and nearly 2,500,000 cyclists in the U.S. The price of a new Vanguard bicycle in 1896 was eighty-five dollars. By 1898, Acme Bicycles was selling bicycles through mail-order for thirty-nine dollars and fifty cents. At the same time, most workers were earning less than $800 per year. Bicycles were a considerable investment for working-class men, but there was also new potential for cheaper, used, bicycles. Wealthier cyclists preferred to buy a new bicycle every year and sell their old models so that they could stay up-to-date with the latest trends and flaunt their economic position.

The act of cycling during the late nineteenth century was more than a popular past-time; it was a social statement. Initially, it was a statement of wealth, as working class members of society did not have the financial means to spend $150 on a luxury item like a bicycle. As the number of manufacturers increased and prices decreased by more than half, greater numbers of people were able to participate in the activity. It was at this point that cycling became an expression of manhood for classes other than the wealthy elite. The manner in which the bicycle was used as an expression of manhood, however, 

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experienced several shifts over time, just as ideals of manhood were undergoing
significant alterations.

The bicycle represented men’s adventurism and pioneering spirit during the 1870s
and 80s, as it allowed them to maintain a sphere that was separate from feminine
domesticity. Men could ride their bicycles outside of the city into nature and get back in
touch with their primitive self-reliant ancestry. After the invention of the safety-bicycle
women partook in cycling more frequently and definitions of manliness as reflected by
cycling were thereby modified to emphasize speed, pluck, and endurance. There were
also attempts to maintain gendered ideals by white middle-class men who attempted to
deny access to cycling to all other groups.

In 1898 and 1899, the American bicycle industry produced around one million
bicycles. Try as they might, bicycle and parts manufacturers would not experience a
similar volume of sales until 1936. This was not because they were incapable of such
output, it was because the market for bicycles contracted as drastically as it expanded. Of
the works that examine the history of the bicycle in the United States, most give a great
deal of attention to the “boom” years in the 1890s, yet little to the “bust.” This
dissertation focuses on the years when the bicycle was least popular. It shows that
understanding a consumer item that moves to the fringe of cultural interest is just as
important as understanding those that are dominant. Therefore, understanding the
bicycle’s history in the United States is just as important as understanding the
automobile’s history. Since the bicycle was a precursor to the automobile, it is often
attributed with laying the groundwork for the automobile’s success. In many ways, the
history and relevance of the bicycle and car converge, but there are also ways in which
they diverge. Understanding the rise and fall of cycling in the United States offers insight into the rise and staying power of cars, which informs our understanding of American society.

By mapping changes in American culture from the 1880s-1950s, this study seeks to understand why American adults’ interest in the bicycle declined while children’s use of bicycles grew. It will do this by focusing on trends in bicycle production, design, and marketing campaigns, which, in turn, affected how society used the bicycle. Each of these individual facets of the bicycle’s history has their own specific issues and nuances. Due to these factors, this study remains somewhat geographically limited to urban areas in the northeast and mid-west, where cycling was prevalent and spans a greater number of years. It is attentive to changes that occurred from 1880 through 1960 because these years are crucial for understanding conceptions of the bicycle that are still prevalent today. It is during this time that the bicycle’s image became irrevocably linked to childhood—a product that adults were supposed to give, not receive. Alternatively, by the 1950s, America was deeply entrenched in an automotive culture that it has yet to move beyond. As a lens for viewing American history, the bicycle offers depth to our understanding of who we are as a nation and how we arrived where we are.

Through observations of cycling and the bicycle industry’s marketing campaigns, this study will elicit a better understanding of societal norms and shifts in American culture. Buying, riding, and racing a bicycle all demonstrated different norms and ideals depending on the specific moment in history and how the consumer understood his own position in the social hierarchy. Likewise, migration, urbanization, suburbanization, economic downturns, and the unique climate of the post-war periods all resulted in
cultural changes that are illuminated by tracing the history of the bicycle. The shifts in American ideals that occurred over time had direct influence not only on bicycle consumption, but also on industry marketing practices and design. These shifts instigated changes in the symbolic nature of the bicycle and the public’s use of it to attain and affirm socially constructed ideals. At the same time, marketing campaigns influenced the construction of these ideals and norms. The connections that can be drawn between American ideals and the bicycle informs our understanding of consumerism, leisure, mobility, sport and how they are all related to unique aspects of American culture. The bicycle industry’s attempts to manage the image of the bicycle in reaction to cultural changes drive this dissertation.

A critical examination of cycling’s loss of status—from one of the most popular forms of sport and recreation among adults in the U.S. during the 1890s to one of unfashionable insignificance by the 1950s—illustrates changes in American ideals and has broader implications for American national identity. Prior to, and during the 1920s, many velodromes closed and competitive cycling moved beyond the purview of the American public. News articles and other media coverage of the sport abated. There was a resulting downturn in the profits of the American cycling industry and a decrease in the frequency of cycling events. Previous works that have touched on this period in the bicycle’s history; attribute the downturn solely to the emergence of the automobile and growing car culture in the U.S. ⁹ This dissertation will show that those explanations are overly simplistic. They fail to fully explain why car sales grew and bicycle sales

declined, or to consider factors other than the car in the bicycle’s loss of consumer appeal. One need only look at France, Belgium, Germany, Netherlands, and other countries to see that the car did not have the same impact on the bicycle around the globe. This study complicates the story of the bicycle’s fall by arguing that many other factors contributed to a dismantling and reconstruction of the bicycle’s image. It also demonstrates how that image embraced a changing, yet specific set of national virtues.

This dissertation argues that aside from looking at the emerging automotive industry to understand the bicycle’s transformation into a child’s toy, we must also consider actions taken by the bicycle industry itself. As bicycle production increased and prices fell, the bicycle industry’s target market—white middle-class males—lost interest. In response, manufacturers began a series of attempts at redefining the bicycle and broadening its market. Each attempt at manipulating the image of the bicycle had significant repercussions that altered its appeal among American consumers. Attempts at first to broaden the market from elites to the middle-class resulted in elites’ loss of interest in the activity. The industry’s subsequent turn to female consumers threatened the masculinity of cycling. Finally, the industry’s decision to begin targeting America’s youth—beginning in the in the 1910s—had an adverse impact on adult participation in cycling. By arguing that the bicycle industry itself was culpable in the bicycle’s loss of status, this study will go beyond overly simplistic arguments that imply the car’s ability to supplant the bike was somehow natural and immediate.

Through an examination of the promotion of the bicycle, first to elites, then to the middle-class, women, and then children, we can gain insights into alterations in American culture and have a better basis for understanding forces that undergird national
identity. This dissertation uses trade journals, newspaper articles, advertisements in adult and juvenile magazines, bicycle catalogs, industry output, changes in bicycle design, and the portrayal of bicycles among items of mass culture to trace the bicycle’s transformation. Trade journals are important because they often reveal how the bicycle industry perceived itself, defined its goals, and in some cases, how it planned to achieve those goals. They discuss pricing, marketing, and the general state of the industry. They are also important because their audience is the shop owner and manufacturer, who are extremely important in alterations of the bicycle’s image. Consumers, on the other hand, are thought to merely accept or reject the appeals of the advertisements. Still, it is important to keep in mind that perceptions of social norms drove the creative strategies of those who created the advertisements.

Advertisements are particularly useful for this dissertation because they not only demonstrate how the bicycle was marketed, but also how it was perceived. They effectively illustrate the differing tactics bicycle producers used to make the bicycle appealing. In turn, they also demonstrate ideals of class, race, and gender—depending on the source from which they are drawn. Advertisements also have the potential to give insights into how a specific industry attempted to influence society. At the same time, however, advertisements and marketing tactics are prescriptive. Attempts to alter the bicycle’s image were not always successful. Therefore, the best evidence for revealing whether efforts were successful is the life span of the tactic. Tactics deemed effective remained in use while those considered ineffective were quickly abandoned. Reception of advertising and marketing prescriptions is also demonstrated by the manner in which
individuals used bicycles, as well as how industries wholly unrelated to bicycles used cycling to promote their own products.

These sources reveal that the effects of rising automobile consumption on cycling are much more complicated than previous works have shown. Instead of completely displacing the bicycle, automobiles influenced the way it was marketed and designed. By the late 1930s, bicycle designs were noticeably changing to appear more like cars, motorcycles, and airplanes. This development not only signaled the capitulation of the bicycle industry to motorized vehicles, but also worked to instill in children a desire for consumer items that were in direct opposition to the bicycle. As cycling became an activity predominately for white middle-class children, the status it once enjoyed—as a legitimate means of transportation and popular recreation for adults—took a back seat to the automobile. In the process of recounting the story of how the bicycle was relegated to the status of child's toy, this study will implicitly highlight the increasing divergence of American culture from other cultures—as cycling fell out of favor among adults in the United States but maintained popularity in other countries. Studies have shown that around 9% of trips are made via bicycle in Germany, 19% in Denmark and 27% in the Netherlands. That same figure for the United States is 1%.10

The central questions that guides this dissertation are: Why did cycling fall out of favor among American adults; how did the bicycle industry address the problem; and what can this tell us about American culture and societal ideals? This informs our understanding of Americans’ self-perception, as individuals and as a nation. This study will also examine how the bicycle has reflected American culture. To that end, it will

consider how the bicycle explicitly demonstrated a specific set of gendered and nationalistic ideals. Primarily, this is limited to the white middle-class, the consumer group the bicycle industry targeted. It also considers how larger social and economic changes manifested themselves in cycling. This includes the effects of urbanization and suburbanization, political decisions, and fluctuations in the economy. While there were decidedly fewer adults consuming bicycles by the 1920s, it is also true that children began flocking to the bicycle in record numbers. It was at this time that children came to represent a majority share of the market. This dissertation shows how that transition came to fruition and what changes factored into the bicycle industry’s decision to abet that transformation.

Of the few scholarly works focusing on the bicycle in the United States, the bulk of attention is given to the bicycle during its “Golden Age” (the late 1880s-1900). Those who attempt to map the entire history of the bicycle in the United States give relatively little attention to the 1910s-1950s and quickly make their way to the 1970s. This is due in part to the fact that Americans’ interest in cycling declined from the 1910s-1950s and because there are fewer sources from that era. They dwindle over the first

11 See: Robert Smith, A Social History of the Bicycle: Its Early Life and Times in America (New York: American Heritage Press, 1972); Andrew Ritchie, King of the Road: An Illustrated History of Cycling (London: Wildwood House, 1975); David Herlihy, Bicycle: The History (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Peter Nye, Hearts of Lions: The History of American Bicycle Racing (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1988); Thomas Cameron Burr, "Markets As Producers and Consumers: The French and U.S. National Bicycle Markets, 1875-1910" (PhD diss., University of California, Davis, 2005). Nye focuses on competitive cycling and attempts to document the history of American cyclists from the 1890s to 1980s. Mostly he recounts the stories of white male cyclists, with one chapter on Nancy Neiman Baranet and a brief discussion of Major Taylor as well as a few other African American cyclists in the post World War II era. Nye, Smith, Herlihy, and Burr all suggest that over-production of bicycles and the emergence of the automobile were most directly responsible for the downfall cycling in the U.S. This dissertation will not attempt to argue against these points, rather, it seeks to complicate and deepen our understanding of how and why this took place. At the same time, it will be more interested in issues of race, class, and gender than other works, which fail to interrogate the meaning of developments in American cycling during the twentieth century.
decade of the twentieth century—making it apparent that the bicycle was no longer remarkable.

The automobile is no doubt a major factor to consider when examining cycling’s decline in the United States. The argument that cars replaced bikes, however, must be interrogated more fully. This work’s contention that the bicycle industry is culpable in the bicycle’s loss of status in the United States will go beyond Thomas Burr’s 2005 dissertation, which is the most detailed account of the bicycle’s declining status from 1875-1910.12 Burr suggests, “Bicycles lost social legitimacy in the United States and retained it in France,” arguing that this was due in part to the over-production of bicycles in the U.S. during the 1890s. This led to a dramatic decrease in price, thereby allowing members of lower classes the opportunity to participate in cycling. Burr and Glen Norcliffe both argue that as the bicycle grew ubiquitous and cheaper in price, its popularity waned, as it became less of a status symbol and more of a common diversion for the masses.13 Comparatively speaking, Burr contends that because France was more moderate in terms of bicycle production, it did not suffer the boom and bust cycle that occurred in the U.S. This study proposes we include, but look beyond production, to also consider industry marketing schemes and the changing symbolism of the bicycle based upon popular usage.

Other works that have examined cycling in the U.S. provide a broad view and document the general history but do not consider the larger social, cultural, and economic issues at play. Robert Smith’s, A Social History of the Bicycle is one such example. His

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book is one of the first academic treatments of the bicycle in the U.S. It provides some important groundwork on the early history of cycling but devotes very little attention to the 1910s-1960s in the final pages. David Herlihy does well building off Smith and others, providing a more thorough examination. He manages to trace not only the early history, which is the real strength of his work, but he also gives attention to the entire twentieth century. His book also considers the bicycle’s development in Europe. This leads to a work that is excellent for a general overview of the bicycle’s entire history, but one that sacrifices depth. Bruce Epperson’s work adds some detail particularly when it comes to the American bicycle industry and production but his focus is primarily on Col. Albert Pope and the Pope Manufacturing Company. His research ends in 1913 and is mostly concerned with the financial state of the Pope Company. Therefore, he gives little attention to forces outside the bicycle industry but excels at highlighting some of the more technical aspects within the industry. This dissertation adds much needed depth to the field by considering the broader social, cultural, and economic developments affecting the bicycle in the first half of the twentieth century. Most notable is the attention this study gives to mobility, consumerism, nationalism, and gender.

Very few works have touched on issues of gender in American cycling. The most in depth treatment of the issue is Norma Dunham’s 1956 dissertation, which discusses women’s participation in cycling and how that informs our understanding of notions of


15 Herlihy, Bicycle; Nye, Hearts of Lions.

femininity at the time.\textsuperscript{17} While Dunham’s dissertation is still very useful, this study will expand on her work by examining the concept of masculinity and how cycling has demonstrated multiple masculinities over time. Dunham argues that the bicycle served as a tool of liberation for women as they began to participate in cycling more frequently. Julia Marie Brock also looked at the issue of women’s emancipation while using cycling as her lens.\textsuperscript{18} Rather than looking at the years of the bicycle boom as a moment of feminine agency, this dissertation will discuss it as a moment in which gender ideals altered and the image of the bicycle mutated into something more androgynous than it had been previously. Like Ellen Gruber Garvey’s excellent article on the bicycle and gender, this dissertation highlights men’s reaction to early female cyclists.\textsuperscript{19} Still, Garvey uses the moment to highlight feminine agency without considering the impact on cycling’s masculine traits. Outside of the U.S., Christopher Thompson provides an exemplary work detailing issues of gender and class in the Tour de France.\textsuperscript{20} Thompson argues that in France, the Tour de France provided a means for men to demonstrate masculinities. Over time, he contends that competitive cycling became less about masculinity and more about technology—due to the manner in which frame materials and bicycle parts were becoming increasingly sophisticated, lighter in weight, and scientific advancements in training techniques.\textsuperscript{21} This dissertation stands out from all previous

\textsuperscript{17} Norma L. Dunham, “The Bicycle Era in American History,” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1956).
\textsuperscript{20} Christopher S. Thompson, \textit{The Tour de France: A Cultural History} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).
\textsuperscript{21} Advancements in bicycle technology also serve as a means to highlight the lines between class, gender and race, because technology comes at a price. White middle and upper class men often purchase and exhibit their access to those technologies not only as an expression of class, but also of their gender.
studies of the bicycle, however, in the connections it draws between masculinity and boyhood.

Regarding the issue of race, this dissertation seeks to go beyond the story of Marshall “Major” Taylor—an African American cyclist who became the first international cycling champion. His experiences provide proof of white America’s attempts to maintain control over the sport of cycling by taking various steps to insure the sport excluded racial minorities and individuals of the lower classes. Taylor’s life has been extensively used for discussions of race and its connection to cycling because his story offers an excellent example of precisely how the sport of cycling was contested terrain. Taylor stated that his primary motivation for publishing his autobiography was so that the younger generations of his own race might be encouraged by his achievements and be unashamed of their race. He was particularly interested in encouraging other African Americans to participate in cycling. His career ended in 1910, however, and there appear to have been relatively few black cyclists to follow his lead. Taylor’s autobiography was first published in 1928, at which point he was living meagerly, trying to sell his book door-to-door. Since then, there have been at least three other biographies of Taylor, various articles, three books written for juveniles, one movie, and his life has been used as an example by countless studies examining race and sport at the turn of the century.  

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The fact that very few primary sources documenting racial issues within cycling as leisure and sport in the United States exist, problematizes attempts to see the whole picture. There were certainly segregated cycling clubs for black cyclists at the turn of the century but little is known about what happened to them. For the most part, the story of race in American cycling is a story of their exclusion and seclusion. Few artifacts of black cyclists remain and bicycle marketing did not target black consumers in any specific way. The small number of advertisements that do exist in black newspapers and magazines are the same as those in white periodicals—featuring art with white middle class families and individuals as well as copy promoting their ideals.

While the primary focus of this study is on the bicycle, it also contributes to our understanding of American culture by examining aspects of consumerism and mobility. In looking at American consumer culture, we need not only examine successful products but also those that failed, or in the case of bicycles, those that succeeded, failed, then resurfaced. The 1910s-50s represents an extremely important span of time when seeking to understand the growth of American consumerism. In this era, the child consumer emerges and bicycle companies are at the forefront as one of the first industries to market their products to children. This story of how and why the bicycle industry focused on boy consumers is crucial to understanding the bicycle’s trajectory in the United States.

With that purpose in mind, the second chapter of this dissertation lays the foundation for subsequent chapters by looking at the American bicycle industry’s boom and bust. Establishing the context for the rest of the dissertation, Chapter Two maps the direction of cycling industry innovations and marketing at the turn of the century and

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South. Sources dealing with cycling in the South might be harder to obtain, but the complete lack of attention to the South is something that needs to be addressed.
how it related to simultaneous changes in American culture. It covers the 1880s-1900s and centers on industrialization, urbanization, the rising need to be strenuous, and intensification of conspicuous consumption. While other works of cycling history have covered this era, it is important to this study because it is critical for understanding the zenith of cycling’s popularity in the U.S. This chapter will also discuss the bicycle’s ability to represent masculinity, femininity, whiteness, and social status. Conversely, it demonstrates how cycling was a contested activity—used by African Americans to demonstrate equality and by women to demonstrate strength and determination. Chapter Two argues that the bicycle industry made active appeals to ideals of masculinity that pervaded the era. Theodore Roosevelt was emblematic of the charge for men to partake in vigorous exercise in the outdoors. The bicycle was promoted as the perfect means of doing so. After the invention of the safety bicycle and women’s increasing participation in cycling, however, simply riding a bicycle no longer affirmed manhood. At that point, the industry began to shift more to cycling for utility and sociability while men attempted to prove their masculinity by riding faster and further than was previously thought possible.

The third chapter ranges from 1909 to 1917. It considers the impact of the growing consumption of automobiles and the unique economic conditions of the World War I era on bicycle sales and usage. This was a time when the reality of the bicycle’s loss of favor among Americans initiated a general sense of alarm within the industry. In response, it initiated a search for solutions. Still in a state of denial, bicycle manufacturers and merchants were forced to acknowledge that the automobile—no longer a toy of American elites—was now a real threat to cycling. With the emergence
of the automobile, the bicycle no longer symbolized technology and social status to the
degree that it had in the 1880s-1890s. Even so, the car was not necessarily a death knell
for the bicycle. Cycling continued to garner some attention as sport throughout the 1910s
and 1920s. The most popular format was the six-day race—fitting for the emerging age
of jazz. Six-day races were a spectacle of human limits, in which spectators would crowd
indoor velodromes into the early morning hours, drinking, smoking, and betting on which
cyclists could endure the tedium of riding a bicycle around a track for six days straight.
Increasingly inexpensive modes of public transportation also had an impact on the
bicycle’s marketability as a form of transportation. Still, the bicycle survived. In part,
this was due to cooperative effort to increase sales but even then, the industry just seemed
to hang on. Chapter Three argues that the increasing speed, reliability, and popularity of
automobiles altered Americans’ concept of mobility particularly in ways that reflected
notions of class, race, and gender. By the 1920s, the automobile had already started to
symbolize American identity. The rise of automobility in American culture exacerbated
the panic within the bicycle industry and set it on a course of trial and error that would
ultimately lead to its decision to invest nearly all of its resources into the pursuit of a
younger demographic.

Chapter Four carries the study forward into the 1920s. While the automotive
industry was coming of age, so was childhood consumerism. The connections between
consumerism and citizenship are well established by such works as Charles McGovern’s
Sold American but this chapter builds on his work by arguing that by the late 1910s, those
connections were made during childhood.24 After some initial sporadic advertisements

24 Charles McGovern, Sold American: Consumption and Citizenship, 1890-1945 (Chapel Hill: University
directed at children, the bicycle industry took a decidedly heavy-handed approach in winning over juvenile consumers after 1915. This move was even more pronounced in the 1920s. Chapter Four argues that the bicycle industry’s concentration on children and growing neglect of adults demonstrated that it had begun to concede defeat to the automotive industry. In consideration of the increased importance of patriotism during World War I, it also shows how appeals to masculinity and health that were formerly used to entice adult males were now being used in attempts to sell bicycles to boys.

Chapter Five follows the bicycle industry into the Great Depression and ends at the onset of World War II. It looks at how American culture was changing because of the automobile. The hope of convincing adults to come back to the bicycle were seemingly dashed by concerns for the safety of cycling in light of the growing amount of automobile traffic on roads. Even when the bicycle’s popularity among adults experienced a resurgence during the second half of the 1930s, the bicycle industry made little effort to maintain or nourish their interest. With the bicycle industry content to supplement rather than try to replace cars, its move toward children was compounded by changes made to the bicycle’s aesthetic. The industry began to market bicycle models that imitated cars, motorcycles, and even airplanes. Chapter Five argues that the Depression era was pivotal for bicycle marketing because it proved children to be a source of steady sales that found success in spite of an economic downturn. The resurgence of cycling among adults during the 1930s, which was short-lived, also confirmed the industry’s belief that children made for more stable sales than adults. This chapter also highlights how the industry’s decision to alter bicycle design to imitate cars may have helped gain children’s interest but it also conditioned them to become obsessed with cars and motorcycles.
Once their bicycles had speedometers, fenders, lights, horns, and gas tanks they could better imagine themselves driving. While children were riding bicycles, they were actually being sold automobiles.

The sixth chapter examines the impact of World War II on bicycle production and consumption as well as the industry’s continued focus on children. It was at this point that the bicycle industry took the final step in transforming bicycles into a plaything for children. After the war, manufacturers began making bicycles that were literally toys, complete with cap guns and cartoon characters included in the decals. By the end of World War II, bicycles were symbolic of childhood in the United States. Chapter Six provides details on how increased suburbanization—which began in the 1920s—the baby boom, and revived concerns about nation and citizenship were all beneficial for bicycle sales. While there was more emphasis on granting children independence there were also concerns about the scourge of juvenile delinquency. Bicycles were promoted as a solution to both problems. They could foster a sense of independence away from parents but they could also be used to start clubs and other organizations in which children occupied their time with wholesome activities such as bicycle touring and camping. By the 1950s, the power of childhood consumerism was undeniable. The bicycle was the epitome of that power.

Together, the chapters trace the bicycle’s transformation from a popular form of locomotion for adults in the 1890s to one of derision by the 1950s and how it changed from a means of demonstrating health and wealth to a tool used temporarily during childhood to prepare for adulthood. Understanding why cycling suffered such a loss in popularity among adults is a necessary part of understanding why and how the United
States would be considered a “car culture” by the 1950s and beyond. In focusing so intently on marketing and designing bicycles to suit the needs and desires of American youth, the bicycle industry effectively turned adults away. The bicycle became a conveyance on which a child moved closer to adulthood.
CHAPTER TWO: “THE GOLDEN AGE OF CYCLING”

In the 1890s, cycling was arguably the most popular urban sport in the United States. At a time when baseball was drawing fewer than 3,000 spectators, bicycle races drew crowds of over 20,000.¹ That popularity proved to be somewhat short-lived, for the 1890s saw both the boom and bust of American bicycle consumption. While similar booms were underway in England, France, and Germany, the bicycle’s growth in popularity and its decline would play out differently in each country. In 1877, England produced 30,000 bicycles yet there were comparatively few cyclists in the United States.² This would soon change as Col. Albert A. Pope, owner of the Pope Manufacturing Company, began production of the Columbia high-wheeler in 1878.³ One year later, nearly 2,500 Americans purchased bicycles.⁴ It would not be until 1890, however, that American bicycle production would near the 30,000 units England produced in 1877, but sales and production would skyrocket soon thereafter (see table 2.1).⁵

⁴ Herlihy, Bicycle, 198.
U.S. Bicycle Production 1888-1902

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1888</th>
<th>1890</th>
<th>1892</th>
<th>1894</th>
<th>1896</th>
<th>1898</th>
<th>1900</th>
<th>1902</th>
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<tr>
<td>Estimated U.S. production</td>
<td>16,750</td>
<td>29,890</td>
<td>60,700</td>
<td>109,300</td>
<td>437,200</td>
<td>928,000</td>
<td>997,000</td>
<td>620,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1

The high-wheeler, mass-produced by Pope, was powered by the directly-driven axle of an inordinately large front wheel. It was commonly referred to as the “ordinary” because the design was relatively standardized compared to earlier experiments. During the 1880s the ordinary became a mainstay in the United States in large part because of Albert Pope. By 1882, he boasted the ability to produce one thousand bicycles a month and estimated that there were around 12,000 ordinaries in the United States. Even still, the ordinary was a flawed design that kept cycling somewhat exclusive.

The ordinary positioned the rider so that most of his weight was over the large front wheel, thereby making it prone to “headers.” This occurred when the front wheel was stopped abruptly and the rider’s momentum carried the body forward, causing him to fly off of the saddle and over the handlebars. The saddle was also relatively high, making riders unable to touch the ground with their feet (fig. 2.1). In fact, simply mounting an ordinary bicycle was considered a courageous act requiring great skill. The rider’s distance from the ground combined with the prevalence of headers gave ordinaries the reputation of being dangerous, which resulted in perceptions of cyclists as daring and extraordinarily athletic. As a result, this had the effect of dissuading all from cycling.

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6 Herlihy, Bicycle, 202.
except those who were coordinated and physically fit. This combined with the fact that the cost of an ordinary, at $150, dissuaded all but upper classes males.

The ordinary’s cost, its reputation as dangerous, and social norms all worked in unison to make the female cyclist a rare sight. Even so, while they were less common than men, there were certainly a number of women who rode ordinaries with great aplomb. This was true even though the ordinary was more dangerous for women, at least for those wearing dresses. Their position over the front wheel meant there was a distinct possibility that their dresses could become entangled in the front wheel. Still, there were those who rode in spite of the dangers. They rode even though it aroused controversy. At the time, athleticism was considered un-becoming of a lady and the independent nature of cycling, which afforded women the freedom to move beyond their family’s surveillance evoked protest from men.\(^7\) Most expected women, if they were to cycle at all, to ride tricycles (fig. 2.1).\(^8\) The tricycle’s steering was operated by levers and the front wheel was slightly off center so that women did not have to straddle a bar or worry about ensnaring their dresses in the wheel. Tricycles were at a noticeable disadvantage to ordinaries, however. By design, they were heavier and less efficient. Consequently, the independence they offered was relatively limited. It would take more innovations before significant numbers of women would participate in the activity.

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\(^8\) Herlihy, *Bicycle*, 201.
The safety bicycle was just such an innovation that made cycling more practical for women. Shortly after manufacturers began mass producing and promoting the safety—which closely resembled modern bicycles—American cycling experienced unprecedented growth. Soon, fenders and chain guards could be installed on safety models with a sloping top-tube. All of these advancements made cycling more accessible to women. They could even safely ride while wearing dresses. As the name suggests, the safety took an element of danger out of cycling. Its wheels were closer in size to one another (they were eventually equal) and the positioning of the rider, nearer the rear wheel, greatly reduced the chance of headers. The safety was also lower to the ground, which not only meant a less severe fall; it also added an aerodynamic element. By 1890, the new design and incorporation of pneumatic tires began a period of rapid growth, which culminated in a bicycle boom from 1896-1898. Demand peaked in 1898 and production did the same one year later with a total output of over 1.1 million bicycles (table 2.1).
Historians have attributed much of the growth experienced during this period to female cyclists. David Herlihy argues, “The vast majority of new purchasers, many of whom were female, favored the new-style safety bicycle.”\(^9\) The safety, however, was not only an innovation but also a source of controversy, especially for those who believed that it was improper for women to cycle. The implication of women’s entry into cycling is a topic that has received some examination.\(^10\) Historian Robert Smith points out that the thought of women on safety bicycles created “vigorous debates.” He contends, “As long as the tricycle was the only thing available to her, a woman could sit between the two rear wheels and travel sedately down the street with a minimum of effort and a maximum of ankle coverage. However, with the advent of the safety bicycle the debate erupted, with some people stoutly maintaining that cycling was not for women.”\(^11\) While works focusing on the history of the bicycle in the United States have traced the bicycle’s exponential growth in popularity during the 1890s and how women came to participate in the activity, there has been little effort to provide a detailed discussion of the connection between the cycling boom and the broader “cult of fitness” that occurred simultaneously.

Public participation in sports and leisure was on a significant upsurge at the turn of the century. John Higham argues that this rise in sport, which occurred primarily among young males, was part of a “growing cult of masculinity.” The “urge to be young, masculine, and adventurous” was evident in the growing popularity of boxing, football,

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and cycling. It was part and parcel of a “profound spiritual reaction,” to the mechanization of industrialized living. As a matter of public opinion, sports were considered beneficial because they offered physical training and diversion from the stresses of city life. The American author, Price Collier contended in 1898, “Not only are muscles and sinews strengthened and hardened, but the temper and the will are trained as well. The man who learns to spar, for example, not only schools his eye, his hands and his feet to respond quickly when called upon, but he learns also, and what is far more important, to keep his temper under control and to take a pounding cheerfully.” Collier considered it beneficial for boys and young men, more so than fully matured adults. For those men, the most valuable benefit of sport was the diversion of mind and body it provided.

These developments influenced cultural norms, among those being consumption patterns and leisure. As consumption and leisure changed, cycling was both effecting change and affected by change. Cycling, whether for leisure or sport, represented a new means of demonstrating and contesting ideals of gender, class, and race. These changes were a boon to the bicycle industry. At the same time, they inspired a confidence in the ability to move product that was ultimately detrimental to long-term success. The bicycle boom of the 1890s witnessed an onslaught of bike manufacturing and merchant upstarts, all hoping to capitalize on the trend. There were nearly 50 manufacturers in 1892 but that numbered rose to over 2,800 by 1898. A majority of these were small manufacturers.

15 Ibid.
producing less than 500 bikes a year, but there were over 300 manufacturers with an annual production well above that number. Sociologist, Thomas Burr argues that this exponential growth in the U.S., as opposed to slower growth in France, led to price competition and market volatility. Prices dropped precipitously in the United States. The average price was around $150 at the beginning of the boom but new bicycles could be purchased for as little as $10 after the bust. The rise of bicycle manufacturing and the resulting lowering of prices changed the way Americans thought about cycling and led those who remained in the industry, after the bust in 1898, to question how they could revive sales to peak levels. By 1904, production fell to 252,923 and stayed below 500,000 for the next ten years. The industry’s efforts to stimulate sales—reflected in marketing and design—altered the bicycle’s image in several small increments. As a result, the symbolic nature of the bicycle changed from the 1880s-1890s. This was particularly true with regard to how the act of cycling reflected and correlated with mutable notions of manhood. Ultimately, these changes culminated in the bicycle’s move from an adult activity to one for juveniles.

The act of cycling during the late nineteenth century was more than a popular past-time, it was, in many ways, a social statement. Initially, it was a statement of wealth; working class members of society did not have the financial means or the spare time for a bicycle. As the cost of the bicycle decreased and greater numbers of people were able to participate in the activity, the manner in which the bicycle was implemented as an expression of manhood changed. The manner by which manliness was expressed

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18 Garvey, “Reframing the Bicycle” 96.
through the bicycle experienced several shifts throughout the Progressive Era as ideals of manhood were undergoing similar alterations. John Higham opened the doors for the study of masculinity with his argument that the growing “cult of masculinity” was one of the most important cultural constructs to America at the turn of the century.\textsuperscript{19} Clifford Putney echoes Higham’s observations about the era, arguing that the urge to be “young, masculine, and adventurous” can in part be explained by a “flourishing . . . strain of religiosity known . . . as ‘Muscular Christianity’. American Protestants . . . [saw] bodily strength [as] a prerequisite for doing good . . . and [a way] to counteract the supposedly enervating effects of urban living.”\textsuperscript{20} Gail Bederman documents how men were so concerned with “remaking manhood” that new epithets were coined during the 1890s such as sissy, pussy-foot, cold feet, stuffed shirt, and overcivilized. “Most telling, however, was the increasing use of a relatively new noun to describe the essence of admirable manhood . . . , masculinity.”\textsuperscript{21} These developments were evident in cycling during the Progressive Era, yet, over the years, much like high fashion, ideals of manhood experienced many alterations, some of which contradicted previous notions of manliness.\textsuperscript{22}

As Gail Bederman argues, “Attempting to define manhood as a coherent set of prescriptive ideals, traits, or sex roles obscures the complexities and contradictions of any


\textsuperscript{22} I will not attempt to define what it meant to be a man in the Progressive Era, nor will I propose to confine manhood to a narrow set of terms such as ‘self-reliant, strong, resolute, courageous, [and] honest.’ Bederman, \textit{Manliness and Civilization}, 6. Bederman is quoting from Peter G. Filene’s definition of manhood provided in, \textit{Him/Her/Self}. 

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historical moment. . . Envisioning manhood as a unified set of traits gives us no way to . . . understand how men themselves negotiated the contradictions [they faced].”23 It is apparent that the self-reliance, strength, resolve, and courage cycling demanded of its participants as a sport, were in fact, traits that were often associated with manhood. A key point to understanding manhood is the idea that gender is not only tied to sex, but also class and ethnicity. In other words, manliness should not only be thought of in terms of how males competed or interacted with females, but also how notions of class and race shaped their perception. “During the decades around the turn of the century, Americans were obsessed with the connection between manhood and racial dominance.”24 White men who participated in cycling used the bicycle not only as a means of reaffirming their strength, perseverance, independence, courage, adventurism, temperance, and virility, but also as a means of exercising authority through the manner in which they attempted to control access to cycling. In essence, white middle-class men demonstrated their manliness through their participation in cycling and their attempts to exclude others. Participating in sport directly, however, was the most obvious way men used sport to affirm masculinity at the turn of the century. The most well-known advocate of participating in sporting activities at the time was Theodore Roosevelt.

Roosevelt was a leading figure in this new movement that seemed obsessed with living a “strenuous life” in America. On April 10, 1899 the men of Chicago’s Hamilton Club turned out en masse to not only celebrate Appomattox Day, but also to hear masculine ideals publicly and politically promoted. They greeted the keynote speaker,

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23 Bederman, Manliness and Civilization, 6-7.
Governor Theodore Roosevelt with thunderous applause as he took the stage. His address on “The Strenuous Life” was an electrifying validation of the sentiments that had been growing among those in the crowd, which was composed of white middle-class men, throughout the decade. As he spoke about the Philippines Roosevelt said,

> We must send out there only good and able men, chosen for their fitness and not because of their partisan service . . . remembering . . . weakness is the greatest of crimes. . . . Let us, therefore, boldly face the life of strife, resolute to our duty well and manfully . . . for it is only through hard work and dangerous endeavor, that we shall ultimately win the goal of true national greatness.  

Roosevelt typified manliness in the Progressive Era and his articulation of the need for a “strenuous life” emboldened American men in their pursuit of the manly ideal. American males’ need to attain manhood was not unique to the late nineteenth century, yet it was a period in which manliness received an unusual amount of attention.

The exercise movement was not confined to the United States. In fact, it was underway in European countries such as Britain and Germany before the 1890s. It is no coincidence that this era also witnessed the birth of the modern Olympics. In 1896, Pierre de Coubertin resurrected the Olympic Games claiming that they would serve as a means of promoting good will among the nations. He also saw value in the Games as a nationalistic tool that would train the bodies of his young compatriots—whom he feared were becoming effete. Nationalism was, in many ways, a force for the revival of fitness because of the ties between ideals of nation and manhood. There arose common fears among many countries that the relatively new trend of living in urban areas along with increasingly mechanized labor was producing weak men who were no longer suited to

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defend or properly represent the strength of their nation. Military and national strength was particularly important to many Americans at this time, as the country began attempts to spread its power and influence globally. Kristin Hoganson argues that these American imperialist pursuits at the end of the nineteenth century were directly related to gender ideals. Among her evidence, she cites Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan’s call for “‘manly resolve’ rather than ‘weakly sentiment’ in U.S. policy. Force must be met with force, he argued, for ‘conflict is the condition of all life.’ In such a strife-ridden world, the nation must strengthen its navy, ‘the arm of offensive power, which alone enables a country to extend its influence outward.’”\footnote{Kristin Hoganson, Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 9-10.} Imperialistic ventures not only gave American men a chance to test and prove their masculinity, they also afforded a paternalist opportunity to foster ideals of manhood among foreign nations.

In the United States, a growing feeling of national complacency also contributed to the increasing importance of physicality. As the American frontier closed, there was a sense that an important test of American manhood was also lost. Price Collier, a student of the cultures of Germany, Norway, Sweden, and America, summed up those feelings in 1898. In his essay about the rise of sport in the United States he wrote, “It is strange that we Americans have not seen the value of physical training in our own country. We forget that the hard work of settling a new country has been for us a form of physical exercise.” He viewed previous wars Americans engaged in as, “hard games we played against the Indians, against fierce nature, against England, and against one another in the sixties. And if we look about us and take stock of our successful men, we find that they come from the country, from the stock that fought battles, built roads and bridges, and
lived the outdoor life of the sportsman.”

His comments also reflect a rising restlessness or dissatisfaction with the possibility that the United States was stagnant. Imperialistic vigor was an important part of maintaining idealistic characteristics of the United States.

Collier’s essay gives insights into the symbiotic relationship that exists between sport, gender, and imperialism. The newfound importance of sport arose not only out of a need for new forms of paramilitary training, but also from a romanticism of the natural, vigorous, outdoor lifestyle of those who settled America. Many men were increasingly feeling robbed of those experiences by industrialization and a new lifestyle that was overly mechanized, over civilized, and entirely too urban. Gail Bederman highlights how white middle-class men at the turn of the century learned that “the excessive brain work and nervous strain which professionals and businessmen endured as they struggled for success in an increasingly challenging economy” made them subject to contracting the recently discovered “disease,” neurasthenia. Neurasthenia, commonly referred to as nervousness, “led many to fear that middle-class men as a sex had grown decadent. Working class and immigrant men, with their strikes and their ‘primitive’ customs, seemed to possess a virility and vitality which decadent white middle-class men had lost.”

To combat these fears, some men turned to Imperialistic pursuits, but many more turned to sport. Often, the perceived virtues of empire, sport and gender all fed off one another. A healthy American male undoubtedly participated in sport and felt justified if not compelled to bring his particular version of manhood to other countries.

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30 See also, Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*.
32 Ibid.
and regions so that other “weaker or effeminate” men (such as those in the Philippines) might be able to improve themselves.33

The growth of cycling beginning in 1890 was an intrinsic part of the aforementioned alterations in an American culture that had become increasingly concerned with the health and manhood of the nation. American men sought sport as a means of rejuvenating a vigorous lifestyle, which had become extremely important, not only to imperialists but also among urban middle-class men in the 1880s-1890s. These men found themselves compelled to discipline and improve their own bodies. Bicycle manufacturers and cycling advocates took advantage of the rise of sport to promote bicycles to those men who had become convinced of a need to improve their physique. To that end, bicycle promoters employed the use of doctors to convince the public that cycling was a “health stimulating exercise . . ., a powerful means of strengthening the human body . . ., an exercise acting as a preventive and curative . . . of certain bodily ailments.”34 One doctor argued that the greater sense of balance that the bicycle instilled in cyclists was a distinct advantage. He wrote, “Those who possess it will be able to jump ditches with greater precision and safety, pass along narrow paths, mount more difficult staircases, climb up and descend precipitous mountains, and will also carry themselves more erect, than those who do not possess this power of preserving an equilibrium.” In addition, the bicycle could help develop strong chest, abdominal, and arm muscles, as well as encourage cyclists to expel the “stagnant air” in their lungs.35 These traits were beneficial because they made men healthier and good health was a

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33 Hoganson, Fighting for American Manhood, 137. Hoganson discusses the ways in which U.S. intervention in the Philippines was driven by ideals of manhood and thoughts that Filipino men were effeminate.
35 Ibid.
requisite of manliness. Doctors and health advocates promoted a steady regimen of exercise as both good for the individual and, in a more subtle manner, good for the nation.

Cycling as sport and leisure initially conformed to a limited, or exclusive, definition of manhood. Advocates from the middle and upper classes promoted it as a healthy and manly activity, but one that was refined and therefore more civilized than brute sports like football or pugilism. An attorney, Charles E. Pratt, was one of the leading advocates of cycling in the 1880s and 1890s. He served as president of the League of American Wheelenmen (L.A.W.) and the editor of Outing. He also published an instructional bicycling manual, The American Bicycler, which attempted to arouse interest in cycling and to put common misconceptions about the activity to rest. In 1879, he boasted, “As a means of exercise, it calls every muscle and nerve and faculty into alert and healthful activity, without fatigue, in the open air, the sunshine, and the natural beauties of a rapidly-changing landscape.”

He combined the health benefits of vigorous exercise with those of nature. Pratt continued, “As a sport, bicycling is manly, innocent, humane and rational. The companionable ‘run,’ the club ‘meet,’ the amateur ‘race,’ are all full of refreshing enjoyment and healthful excitement. The friendly emulation and the voluntary struggle compel regular and temperate habits.”

Here, Pratt extolled the benefits of club membership and fraternization as well as the benefits of self-control that exercise granted individuals. The focus on self-control over one’s own body was

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37 Ibid., 31.
38 Stefan Szymanski “locates the origin of English sports in eighteenth-century associativity rather than nineteenth-century industrialization.” Pratt certainly makes an appeal to the benefits of associativity, however, he is also specifically articulating a notion of manhood that was a response to industrialization.
particularly important to those of the burgeoning temperance movement. In turn, the temperance movement was based, in part, on gendered ideals of the middle-class. For them, a man was expected to have complete control in his life, not just control over his family, home, and social inferiors, but also over his own body.

Self-control was also a requisite of good health. Connections between good health, temperance, and cycling led some to believe rising bicycle sales were cause for dwindling sales of alcohol and tobacco. In June of 1896 an article in *Scientific American* titled “The Ravages of the Bicycle Boom,” claimed that the increasing popularity of bicycles had a negative impact on various pastimes and consumer goods, such as a drop in the sale of cigars by over 700,000,000.³⁹ Robert Smith argues, “Instead of idling the Sunday afternoon, smoking a cigar and drinking a schooner or two of beer, the young bloods were out on their bicycles, scorching through the streets and breathing nothing but clean air. And this hurt the tobacco business.”⁴⁰ Many cyclists also cut out drinking altogether and those who continued to drink did so with much more moderation. The French bicycle racer turned journalist Henri Desgrange argued,

> Cycling as a sport is still more interesting, from a moral point of view. Quite a large number of our young men, who formerly were addicted to stupid habits, and the seeking of nonsensical distractions and vulgar pleasures, are now vigorous, healthy, energetic, and for the sake of this extraordinary machine submit themselves to an ascetic rule of life, and, induced by imperative desire of quiet and regular living, and, most important of all, the steady exercise of self-control, by resisting their appetites and doing, without hesitation, all that is required for effectual training.⁴¹

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⁴¹ Henri Desgrange, *Scientific American* 72, January 12, 1895, 22.
Kennedy Childs, the secretary of the National Board of Trade of Cycle Manufacturers, felt that the issue of drinking and smoking was important enough to directly address in his suggestions for those who were training for cycling competitions. He wrote, "The question of drink is one that should receive, in an article of this nature, a statement of opinion. . . . [W]e incline to the belief that in many cases the moderate use of malt liquors at table can do no harm, and may be of positive benefit." Smoking, on the other hand, was strongly discouraged.42 There were a variety of opinions regarding drinking. Childs specifically mentions some of the more popular racers of the era to point out that there were some who drank and some who did not, all with mixed results. The most important thing for those who did drink was that they did so in moderation. Whether the rider was a moderate drinker or a teetotaler, there was a necessary component of self-restraint and self-discipline.

Dr. W. Gordon Stables, M.D., touted the benefits of the bicycle in his book *Health on Wheels*. He argued that the best method for attaining healthy manhood was, “by being temperate not only in eating and drinking but in everything; and by taking a proper amount of exercise of the kind most suited for individual health—the best by far at the present day being what we term Cycling.” In his opinion, cycling was a “means of preserving and restoring the vital powers.”43 The concept of moderation was something that was to be practiced by *healthy men* in all aspects of life. This even applied to the amount of exercise and muscle building in which one partook. Many held the opinion that a healthy man was not over-developed or disproportionately muscular. For these individuals, the ideal body was a strong, but natural one. This was a clear rejection of the

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42 Childs, "Training for Cycling Competitions," 347.
43 "Health on Wheels," *Outing, an Illustrated Monthly Magazine of Recreation* 6, no. 4, July 1885, 495; This article is quoting W. Gordon Stables, M.D., *Health on Wheels* (London: Iliffe & Son, 1885).
over-civilized shut-in whose muscles had atrophied. He desired the idealized body type of his self-reliant ancestors—men, who lived in an increasingly glorified time when things were more primitive, work involved sweat, and the landscape of the natural countryside was home. Even those who were born weak could “strengthen and vivify their systems, by adopting a plan of judicious and rational living; by steering clear of that rock on which so many lives are lost . . . , the abuse of medicine; by proper attention to cleanliness; by drinking only pure water; by breathing, as far as possible, only pure air; by avoiding worry as much as they can.”

Charles Pratt’s book on cycling also attempted to define contemporary ideals of manhood, arguing the bicycle was a means of achieving, “The training of eye and ear, the alertness and suppleness of limb and joint and muscle, the quick observation, the prompt decision in emergency, the strength and courage and self-reliance. . . .” As president of L.A.W. and magazine editor, Pratt was able to disseminate his opinions to a somewhat broad audience, however, it would have primarily been to those who already owned and enjoyed bicycles. In some respects, Pratt’s argument about the bicycle was similar to what many consider the seemingly contradictory goals of Progressivism—the political milieu in which the bicycle was blossoming. Michael McGerr highlights some of the contradictions of the Progressive movement in the U.S., such as the way it glorified the yeoman farmer yet seemed unwilling to embrace the agriculture movement and celebrated new technologies such as cars and airplanes. In the 1890s, bicycles represented many of the same things cars and airplanes would come to represent ten to

44 “Health on Wheels,” 495.
45 Pratt, The American Bicycler, 32.
twenty years later. Similarly, Pratt defined the bicycle in contradictory terms that embraced modernity and yet, at the same time, had the capability of restoring the primitive qualities of manhood, which were perceived as endangered by industrialized, urban lifestyles. Curiously, cycling was an activity associated with modernity and technological advancement in the 1880s and 1890s, yet it was often celebrated as a vehicle that could restore nature and the waning sensibilities of the self-reliant man. Historian, Richard Harmond made note of this fact in his study of the bicycle writing, “it was this paradoxical attraction of the bicycle—as an instance of inventive progress and as a means of flight from the consequences of such progress—which substantially explains the great cycle craze of the years between 1893-96.”

Pratt recognized this paradox and so he advocated a specific form of manhood wherein men could embrace modernity and civilization without compromising their natural, primitive manliness. His instructional manual argued that cycling was manly because it did not need a spur, whip or those “ungentlemanly associations, and even excesses and cruelties, which are so often objectionably attendant upon boxing, billiards, trotting, pedestrian races, and other public exhibitions of physical training or endurance.” Cycling, he argued, was a “gentlemanly recreation, a refined sport.” The sporting magazine, Outing also supported the idea of cycling as a refined sport. An editorial, possibly written by Samuel Sidney McClure, proclaimed, "Bicycling in both England and America is largely on the increase, and is probably at the head of all the graceful

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47 For an argument that the bicycle represented modernity, see: William H. Beezley, Judas at the Jockey Club and other Episodes of Porfriian Mexico (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987).
48 Richard Harmond, “Progress and Flight: An Interpretation of the American Cycle Craze of the 1890s” Journal of Social History 5, no. 2 (Winter, 1971-1972): 236. As table 2.1 above shows, the craze was not over by 1896 but many bicycle historians agree that by 1898 the “bust” was in sight.
49 Pratt, The American Bicycler, 31-2
recreations.” The opinion that cycling was manly because it was civilized contradicted the idea promoted by Theodore Roosevelt and others, that men were becoming effeminate because they were overcivilized. One reason why Pratt stressed the genteel nature of cycling was due to the ongoing struggle for acceptance that cyclists waged among the general public during the 1870s and 1880s. This reflects a particular conceptualization of manliness based on the ideals of the white middle and upper class. As cycling entered the 1890s and became more affordable, the stress of “gentlemanly behavior” and “graceful movement,” as manly characteristics, would wane while a shift in focus toward speed and record-breaking emerged as the prevailing characteristics of manliness.

Health concerns, which were directly related to perceptions that Americans were growing more nervous and effete, were important factors in bicycle advertisements of the 1890s. Their appeals employed modern advertising techniques to promise good health and economic prosperity for consumers. In his study of advertising’s history in America, Roland Marchand argues that advertising matured and took on a new scope during the 1920s-30s. He explains that advertisements “increasingly gave predominant attention to the consumer rather than the product.” This was actually happening well before 1920. Bicycle advertisements had clearly “matured” and focused on consumers rather than the product as early as 1892. An advertisement for the Pope manufacturing company promoted bicycles as a means of increasing enjoyment and rewards in life not only through the health benefits it bestowed on cyclists but also through the monetary rewards.

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50 “The Outing Club,” Outing, an Illustrated Monthly Magazine of Recreation 6, no. 1, April 1885, 103. For S.S. McClure (muckraking journalist and co-founder of McClure’s magazine) as editor of Outing see, Robert A. Smith, A Social History of the Bicycle, 9.
of that good health. In an attempt to lure business away from public transportation, one of its ads proclaimed, “Save $60 a year—have elegant time doing it—never felt so well—can do ten hours’ work in seven—salary raised yesterday—employers like healthful men.”52 This ad shows that as early as 1892, advertising campaigns were attempting to broaden appeal beyond elites, to white-collar workers. It focused not only on the bicycle’s ability to define and alter one’s social position, but also highlighted how men could use bicycles to demonstrate vigor. The bicycle could help men succeed in life by impressing their bosses with their healthful manhood and by saving themselves money that would otherwise be spent on public transportation. Here, the Pope Manufacturing Company was targeting a specific class ideal of masculinity.53 While the bicycle was considered a toy of the elites during the 1860s through the 1880s, by the 1890s, members of the bicycle industry urged the bicycle’s transformation into a utilitarian device of the middle classes.

Manufacturers took advantage of urban middle-class men’s feelings that they needed to strengthen and discipline their own bodies by promoting bicycles as a means to gain health and experience nature. T.J. Jackson Lears shows how those commenting on the Americans’ problems at the turn of the century “traced the rise of nervous illness to ‘modern civilization.’ The Unprecedented speed with which railway and telegraph allowed people to transact business, the barrage of information from magazines and newspapers, the monotony of routinized, subdivided labor—all were cited as causes of

52 Pope Manufacturing Company, "Without Car Fare," *Scientific American* 67, no. 15, October 8, 1892, 238.
53 Workers of the lower classes whose labor required physical strength did not have quite the same need to demonstrate their vigor.
nervousness or insanity.” To combat those ailments, as Lears argues, many turned not only to “martial bellicosity” or boxing and football, they also sought “bicycling and outdoor life in general.” The Harbison and Gathright Bicycle Company capitalized on the manly ideals outdoor life provided by marketing their bicycles as analogous to nature. One of their advertisements told consumers,

Nature intended every human being to be perfectly developed. Since the hurry and hustle of our American civilization first swallowed up the healthy life of the Indian, the people have had no time to completely develop themselves. Nature saw that this couldn’t go on, and her solution of the problems was the Tribune Bicycle, a wheel built for health, joy and economy, and to annihilate time.

Harbison and Gathright directed this ad at those who saw the city and industry as a deteriorative force that stifled men’s muscular development, joy of life, and health. An article from the Toledo Medical and Surgical Reporter claimed, “The locomotor apparatus of man craves exercise as the stomach craves food, and the gratification produces similar good feeling in the respective organs.” This article suggested that real men stood apart because they actually craved exercise. Since any proper man would crave exercise, bicycle promoters believed all they needed to do was prove to them that the bicycle was the best means of exercise and then make it available. Michael McGerr argues that indeed a “rage for cycling” did result from the middle class, who were “caught up in a cult of fitness.” Because of the exercise boom that was occurring at the time, bicycle ads had to do relatively little work; they did not need to convince, or change men’s minds, they just needed to give them a nudge toward the bicycle.

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55 Ibid., 108.
57 Toledo Medical and Surgical Reporter, “Bicycle Riding,” *Scientific American* 72, no. 7, February 16, 1895, 105.
As the number of advertisements targeting men’s insecurities proliferated, it is clear that bicycle promoters believed American men were turning to the bicycle in attempts to affirm their manhood. Even companies outside of the bicycle industry were aware that insecure men were turning to sport and the bicycle to affirm manhood. Their advertisements often appeared alongside advertisements for bicycles. Similar to bicycle manufacturers, medical companies exploited fears that manhood was waning. One ad for the Erie Medical Company read, “Four out of five who suffer nervousness, mental worry, attacks of ‘the blues,’ are but paying the penalty of early excesses. Victims, reclaim your manhood, regain your vigor. Don’t despair.”59 The ad featured a half-nude female, kneeling down drawing water from a well. Those in the medical profession often spoke of “nervousness” as one of the most rampant side effects of industrialization and urbanization.60 Another advertisement from the same company used the headline “Weak Men,” and pictured a scantily clad woman sitting on top of a prostrate lion.61 The fact that these ads often ran in the same sections that reported on bicycling news, and near advertisements for bicycles, highlights that men who were insecure about their manliness were prone to turn to sport, particularly cycling, in attempts to reclaim their manhood.

In making appeals to gendered ideals, the bicycle industry effectively shaped the image of the bicycle so that it symbolized health and manhood. Pamela Laird’s study of American business and consumer marketing verifies that bicycle advertisements were indeed successful. She argues that the bicycle industry offered “an attractive illustration of advertising’s powerful impact in helping to build a new and quite respectable

60 Lears, No Place of Grace, 47-58.
industry."^{62} The Pope Manufacturing Company alone invested over $500,000 a year in advertising by 1897.\(^{63}\) Bicycle advertisements appeared in a myriad of sources. Their art and copy linking notions of health with the bicycle set the tone for “modern advertising” techniques that Roland Marchand describes as coming to the fore in the 1920s. Bicycle advertising not only helped to shape the bicycle’s image, the artwork it employed diffused the act of cycling to a broader audience.

By the mid-1890s—as cycling became somewhat common and therefore less extraordinary—the physical act of riding a bicycle was not enough, in and of itself, to demonstrate manhood. This was particularly true after a massive influx of female cyclists. Still, cycling was an activity associated with certain notions of manhood because it remained a somewhat exclusive activity. In fact, that exclusivity was an important aspect. It allowed white-male cyclists a chance to secure their own idealized version of manhood through attempting to control access to the activity. This could be done through club membership and/or race participation. A commonly used template for club rules and by-laws stated that membership should be open to, “any gentleman who is not a professional bicycler.”\(^{64}\) The use of the word “gentleman” was not only an expression of the exclusion of women from the club, but it was also a subtle and yet very loosely-defined term that could be used to exclude those of other races, ethnicities, and classes. The exclusion of professional cyclists was an attempt to maintain class based ideals of manhood. It denoted that members must participate in the activity solely because they enjoy it, not because they are talented enough to make money from

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\(^{63}\) Ibid.

\(^{64}\) Pratt, The American Bicycler, 174.
participating. This language of amateurism, popular among all “respectable” sports at the time, particularly Olympic sport, was simply a means of excluding all except those that had the free time and discretionary money to invest in leisure. Additionally, these clubs often included a membership fee of around five dollars, which could work to achieve the same end. Groups who were excluded occasionally created their own clubs but they were generally denied access to events organized by cycling elites.

Competitive cycling was another area in which organized and unorganized white male cyclists sought to maintain certain ideals of masculinity. The characteristics of manhood demonstrated in competitive cycling, however, were different from those of cycling as leisure. In the case of competitive cycling, white men attempted to exercise control over access to races and participated in acts of intimidation against individuals who defied the norms of the sport. Cyclists were not able to simply show up at a venue and gain permission to enter the contest, particularly at the more prestigious races. In order to enter organized races, they had to be a member of the organization or sanctioning body that was governing the race. Initially, this was the responsibility of the L.A.W., which was known to deny individuals the right to participate, especially if they were black.65

The most well-known and best documented case of the L.A.W. barring a black cyclist from competition was that of Marshall “Major” Taylor.66 The story of how Taylor came to be a competitive cyclist is unique. Born outside of Louisville, his family moved near Indianapolis while he was still young. It was there that he became friends with the

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65 There were individual chapters of L.A.W. in each state and the ultimate authority over race entry was controlled by the state chapters.

wealthy white son of his father’s employer and was subsequently introduced to the bicycle. A few years later he worked at a bicycle shop in town, dressing up in a military uniform and performing tricks on bicycles to entertain potential customers. As Taylor got older, he began entering races and quickly proved himself virtually unbeatable in segregated amateur races. He soon set his sights on beating the white professional cyclists who were the champions of the sport. Becoming a professional cyclist was not based on talent alone and because there were no professional cyclists among the ranks of the all-black events, they were unable to garner as much publicity as white cycling events. Taylor was soon restricted from more and more competitions and ultimately encouraged to move to Massachusetts by his mentor, Birdie Munger, so that he could have more opportunities to race. Because L.A.W. restrictions were enforced differently from state to state, Taylor was barred from competition in Kentucky and Indiana but permitted to race in Massachusetts. He went on to win the United States cycling championship and ultimately became the first African American athlete to achieve international acclaim when he became the world champion.

In northern states where there was no explicit ban against African Americans, there were more subtle forms of segregation that could serve to achieve the same objective—such was the case with the location of the races. In the 1890s, a majority of African Americans who were living in the North, lived in the urban centers, yet velodromes and cycling tracks were often constructed on the periphery.67 Newly constructed tracks, like Charles River Park in Boston, were built on the outskirts of town,

67 A few maps from the era show where some of the more popular tracks were located during the 1890s-1900s. http://alabamamaps.ua.edu/historicalmaps/us_states/massachusetts/index2.html (accessed March 20, 2008). They show that some of the tracks were far away from larger urban cities, such was the case for the track in Falls River Massachusetts; for Charles River Park see: Anonymous, “Site Through Time: Piecing Together the Past,” http://architecture.mit.edu/class/city/projects04/centsq_2/text.htm, (accessed March 20, 2008).
where there was ample space and where the middle class could go for a day of relaxation and recreation. Steven Reiss argues, “Impoverished inner-city residents had little free time, discretionary income, or accessible playing space. Consequently, they were for years limited to cheap sports available in their immediate neighborhood . . . , and until mass transit became cheap they were underrepresented at legal spectator sport contests located on the urban periphery.”

It would have also been difficult for working class residents of the urban centers to find the time or energy to participate in competitive cycling. While this may have been more of a problem for would-be spectators than actual participants, the limited access that all races and ethnicities of the lower class had to the grandstands at bicycle tracks affected their ability to develop an interest for, or participate in, the sport.

The problem of access to cycling went beyond venue locales. For black participants, even if they were able to make it to the track, they were in no way guaranteed the right to compete. In 1898, the manager of Woodside Park track in Philadelphia announced that “colored riders,” including Taylor, were banned from the track. Fortunately, Taylor was already relatively popular, which gave him the benefit of a large public outcry and a Pennsylvania Senator who interceded on his behalf.

Though Taylor was allowed to race at several northern venues, he was not always guaranteed the right to do so. Other, lesser-known, black cyclists would have had an even more difficult time gaining access to competitions with white participants.

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When black cyclists were allowed to enter integrated races, they competed at their own risk. If they beat any white rider, they could expect repercussions. While some white cyclists simply refused to race against black cyclists like Taylor in particular, others used races as an opportunity to injure black riders. Floyd McFarland, ringleader of the conspiratorial effort against Taylor, was so threatened by Taylor's success that he initiated a pact among a group of white riders to team up against Taylor during races. These riders would pocket Taylor, trapping him on the track, while another rider sprinted to victory. They also reverted to attempts at physically harming Taylor by purposefully wrecking him. When the group successfully defeated Taylor, they would split the prize purse. Partially as a result of this treatment and from necessity, black cyclists created their own cycling clubs and events. Yet these organizations and their events lacked the opportunity for social mobility and the national fame white events offered because they did not draw as much attention from the media and they were unable to offer the same size prize purses. Black cycling clubs were left to fend for themselves and did not receive the same support from the League of American Wheelmen or other collective organizations. In 1892, the Associated Cycling Clubs of Chicago voted against admitting the Chicago Colored Cycling Club to the privileges of their association. Many other Northern cities followed in Chicago’s footsteps. Still, the creation of black cycling clubs shows that African Americans were not merely victims of segregation; they were active agents who created their own means of participation and who expressed their own athleticism. Just as Jackie Robinson demonstrated his unique style in baseball, Major

Taylor demonstrated his individuality. Unlike the riders who would try to set a hard pace throughout an entire race, Taylor would often fall back from the pack until nearing the finish, at which point he would dart out from behind the other riders and sprint to the finish with spectacular fury. This also worked to his advantage because it made the races he participated in more exciting for spectators.

A similar development took place among professional baseball players. Jules Tygiel argues, “some of the discrimination in baseball was more hidden, like the fact that you had to be an outstanding black player to make it to the majors, much better than the average white man in the majors.”73 This was undoubtedly the same for black cyclists. When blacks were restricted from entering races against white competitors it usually involved an argument over the athletes’ ability to compete. White men would say that the black athlete should be barred because he had no real chance of keeping up with white riders, while black athletes argued, and Major Taylor proved, they could win.74

The competition against white athletes was an integral part of muscular assimilation. After all, Taylor did not gain recognition because of his accomplishments among the black cycling clubs, it was his victories against whites that gained him notoriety.

As Taylor proved his superior ability, he gained opportunities to enter more prestigious races and soon found that he no longer needed the support of the black clubs. This was especially true after he became a professional cyclist but it took some good fortune for Taylor to become a professional since the L.A.W. had previously ruled that

74 “Simmons Wants to Race: The Colored Rider Will Go to Law to Have His Entry Accepted.” New York Times, May 24, 1894. The newspaper article felt that Simmons’ ability to win was an important issue over the argument of whether he should be able to participate in the race or not. “Simmons’ friends claim that he can defeat any of the men entered in the race. Good judges, however, say that Simmons would stand no chance with a number of the men entered.”
blacks were ineligible for membership. Even though the League governed most races, it was the Racing Board of New York that granted Taylor’s application to become a professional. Andrew Ritchie, Taylor’s biographer, argues that the Racing Board “was not in sympathy with the racist legislation voted into the L.A.W. constitution in Louisville. . .” He posits that Taylor’s mentor, Birdie Munger, had friends among the officials in New York whom he depended on to help give Taylor the opportunity to register.\footnote{Andrew Ritchie, \textit{Major Taylor: The Extraordinary Career of a Champion Bicycle Racer} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 59.} This takes some of the credit away from Taylor and lends credence to a worn-out style of thinking, which suggests success would not have come without the help of paternalistic whites. Taylor was very careful in the way he conducted himself precisely because he wanted to win the hearts of those who might otherwise oppose his participation based on color alone. He at least wanted to prove that there were exceptions to their racist ideas and if given a chance, blacks would prove themselves just as virtuous, hard working, and smart as whites. After turning professional, Taylor gained permission to enter bigger races in which he was able to compete among predominantly white fields of cyclists. It was in these instances that Major Taylor was able to directly confront the notion of black inferiority and as a result, he generated a considerable amount of attention. With his name on the bill, promoters were confident that tickets would sell.\footnote{“Major Taylor Beaten: Frank Kramer Won First Race of National Cycling Association Grand Circuit Series at Vailsburg...” \textit{New York Times}, July 27, 1902. This article details the unusual amount of interest in the race because Major Taylor “the negro cyclist” had made an appearance at a local track. This was after he had raced most of the season in France.} For promoters, however, increased revenues were the priority, not racial equality, and other African American cyclists were not as fortunate as Taylor. These lesser-known cyclists were forced to wage their own battles without the public and political support that Taylor enjoyed.
Such was the case with the black cyclist W. Simmons. In 1894, officials rejected his entry form for the Irvington-Milburn race in New Jersey. He vowed to fight the rejection even if it meant taking the case to court. Simmons argued officials promoted the race as one that was open to the world and he intended to go to the event and demand that his participation be granted. “If it [was] denied . . . he [would] try to obtain an injunction restraining the association from interfering with his rights as a citizen. He claim[ed] that the course over which the race [was] to be run [was] a public highway, and he ha[d] the same right to ride over it as any other citizen.”77 While Simmons may have had a right to the public highway, it was determined that he did not necessarily have a right to participate in a bicycle race organized by white men.

Not all whites were in favor of segregated sport, but they often tried to side-step responsibility for integrating athletic events by placing blame on southerners and implying that the issue was beyond their control. An article in the League of American Wheelmen newsletter mockingly ridiculed racist riders for potential reasons why they would not want integrated racing. It proclaimed, “No rider in a race cares who is behind; he only worries about the men who are likely to take positions in front, from which location the odor of an over-heated ‘nigger’ would become intensely offensive in the aesthetic nostrils of our more fastidious Southern member.”78 The author’s intention may have been sarcasm, but he alludes to an important point. White riders’ opposition to integrated competition was driven by a fear of the potential for a black man to lead the

77 “Simmons Wants to Race: The Colored Rider Will Go to Law to Have His Entry Accepted.” New York Times, May 24, 1894.
race, or worse, to beat them to the finish. It is also apparent that the author was unable to see, or admit to the de facto forms of segregation inherent in the Northern white society.

For those African American cyclists who made successful inroads into the sport, there were other challenges to meet. When Major Taylor first began racing in earnest, at the age of 16, he was the quintessential underdog. Taylor lined up among some of the U.S.’s top riders virtually unknown, poor, black, and small in stature. References to him as the “colored whirlwind” and the “dusky champion,” celebrated him more as a spectacle than a hero. He was popular among spectators, but the reason for his popularity is an issue of contention. Major Taylor and his biographers suggest that he was popular because he was a fair and honest sportsman. Jan Boesman, who has examined Taylor’s popularity in Europe, suggests that his appeal among Europeans may have simply been due to his exoticism. Taylor would not have been seen as exotic to Americans but it is likely that idea of “a colored whirlwind” on a bicycle, flying around the track at breakneck speeds, would have been amusing to many white spectators. Taylor did not draw crowds necessarily because he was “well-behaved,” it was the fact that he was daring enough to take his chances against white competitors, often out-smarting and beating them, that made the races he participated in spectacular. Spectators may have jeered white competitors when they fouled Taylor, but it was his exhilarating speed in

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80 Andrew Ritchie, *Major Taylor: The Extraordinary Career of a Champion Bicycle Racer* (San Francisco: Bicycle Books, 1988), 161, 210; Jan Boesman, “Race: Waarom is Wielrennen Wit?” (PhD diss., Lessius Hogeschool, 2006). Boesman lives in Belgium and has asked a similar question, why is cycling white? His dissertation is written in Dutch so this is based on a discussion via email in which he summarized his arguments in English. Taylor traveled to Europe to race on multiple occasions for extended periods from 1901-1909. He did this in part because there was more opportunity for him to race but the prize money and number of spectators was also undoubtedly greater in Europe than the U.S.
combination with the jealousy of whites, who would go to great lengths to defeat him, that packed the stands.

Promoters often capitalized on the presence of a black competitor to advertise events, stressing the issue of race over individual merits or prize purses. Newspapers printed racist cartoons of Taylor in attempts to humor, or foster a paternalistic spirit among Northeastern whites (fig. 2.2).\textsuperscript{81}

Spectators were drawn to events with a black competitor because of the added drama of competitions heralded as mock race wars. A button advertising a race in 1898 at Charles River Park devotes the largest amount of its space to boldly proclaim “Black vs. White,” while the location of the race, names of individuals on the bill, and other details about the race are treated as superfluous.\textsuperscript{82} Major Taylor’s participation allowed promoters to construct events as a test of white supremacy. The fact that he was a “well-behaved”

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{majah_breaks_records.png}
\caption{“Majah” breaks some records.}
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black man was often only important to the governing bodies that could pull the strings to allow him to race. This is more apparent when comparing Taylor with the boxer Jack Johnson. Johnson made no apologies for his race, nor did he readily accept inequality. Because of this, he was considered “defiant.” Public officials generally tried to create reasons for arresting Johnson, while officials treated Taylor more favorably because of the subtle manner in which he confronted white superiority. Still, race officials did make racing difficult for Taylor by strictly enforcing rules against him while his white competitors merely received a warning for committing similar infractions. Judges also made it more difficult for Taylor to win by denying him victory in close finishes. In spite of these efforts to keep black cyclists in their place, a few black cyclists such as Taylor and to a lesser degree, Woody Hedspeth, had successful careers.

These obstacles were not simply a by-product of racist attitudes. Rather, racism was often a product of white men’s fear of emasculation through their perceived loss of power and control over the social order. The simplest way for white men to ensure that they maintained their position in the social hierarchy was to force all other groups into their proper “place.” Cycling as a sport and as leisure was yet another area that was considered “off-limits” to African-Americans through exclusionary practices in the North

84 For judge’s bias against Taylor see ibid., 133-5. For official bias against him see ibid., 385 which includes a letter to the editor of an Adelaide newspaper.
85 There is relatively little know about Hedspeth. He appears in a few photos from the era and was possibly also from Indiana (like Taylor). Tracking down information about him is complicated by multiple spellings of his last name, Hedspeth, Hedspeed, Hudspheth, Hedsputh, Hedgespeth, etc. and the fact that he allegedly married a white European ballerina and spent the remainder of his life abroad (possibly in Belgium).
and physical violence directed at any African American brave enough to attempt to publicly ride a bike in the South.\textsuperscript{87}

Exclusionary practices were not only directed toward minority groups. It is clear that women were also strongly discouraged from participating in races or even riding their bicycles with significant speed. Rigorous cycling was only seen as suitable for men. All women, however, did not embrace those standards. In many ways, the women’s movement for greater independence and suffrage was apparent even in cycling. Women, who were once discouraged from cycling, continued to confront social convention by pedaling their way toward greater liberation. The suffragist Frances Willard referred to her bicycle as an “implement of power.”\textsuperscript{88} She and other women did not merely seek access to the bicycle; they struggled for complete and total freedom to use it in whatever manner they saw fit. In this struggle, they often had to overcome men’s attempts to place limitations on their access to cycling. As did many of the debates concerning the propriety of women’s activities during this era, the opposition to women cyclists was often couched in terms of health. In her essay on bicycles and gender, Ellen Gruber Garvey shows “Both defense and attack took medicalized form: antibicyclers claimed that riding would ruin women’s sexual health by promoting masturbation and would compromise gender definition as well, while probicyclers asserted that bicycling would strengthen women’s bodies—and thereby make them more fit for motherhood.”\textsuperscript{89}

One such “attack” came from opposition to women’s adoption of the “scorcher” position, which was necessary in attaining faster speeds. This position was the most

\textsuperscript{87} Major Taylor talks about the intimidation and veiled threats he was subject to just for attempting to train on the public roads in Savannah, Georgia in the few days he spent there prior to a race, which he ultimately withdrew from in his autobiography, \textit{The Fastest Bicycle Rider in the World: The Autobiography of Major Taylor} (Battleboro: S. Greene Press, 1972).

\textsuperscript{88} Quoted in, Garvey, “Reframing the Bicycle,” 72.

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 66.
common posture of men who raced with their chest bent over the handle-bars, backs arched, and their bodies in a forward position on the nose of the saddle. Such posture decreased wind resistance and added power by positioning the rider’s weight more directly over-top of the pedals. In this instance, objections to women’s participation were framed in terms of both hygiene, and health. Medical experts claimed that the position, coupled with strenuous exercise, could lead to physical deformations of women’s bodies as well as potential damage to their reproductive organs. An article in the *Brooklyn Medical Journal* went so far as to claim, “[t]he bicycle teaches masturbation in women and girls” because of the angle of the saddle. 90 Garvey argues, “Riding was a threat to gender roles; while it would be safe for healthy men to do so, it would be dangerous for women to expend so much of their strength on physical activity.” 91 Expectations were that a “proper” woman’s first priority would be to her duties as a wife and/or potential mother. While some doctors opposed cycling for women all together, others argued a moderate amount of cycling was beneficial because it maintained health and could make them more attractive. Still, there was certainly a fine-line between a healthy amount of activity and too much. Too much cycling would have detrimental results.

White males’ attempts to limit women’s access to cycling were not unique to the United States. An anonymous English writer argued that there was to be “one unwritten axiom that the universal custom of civilized communities has stereotyped into recognition, it is that the gentler sex must on all occasions consult appearances in a

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91 Quoted in, Garvey, “Reframing the Bicycle,” 74.
special manner not demanded of men.”

This particular writer’s concern involved whether women could ride tricycles without sacrificing their appearance. He did not even consider the possibility of women on bicycles, for “obvious reasons,” which was undoubtedly an allusion to the fact that women could not efficiently ride the common bicycle in a side-saddle mount or otherwise without inciting controversy. He described himself as repulsed by the sight of women on bikes with their “bodies bent well forward, knees up and down anyhow—struggling along with purple faces and hair awry . . .”

To him and many others, the thought of female athleticism was improper and unattractive.

The article voiced a common objection to women’s participation in what were seen as “male sports.” The author, much like many men of the era in both the U.S. and Europe, was, however, willing to accept women’s participation in cycling so long as it was limited strictly to leisurely activity. It must not compromise a woman’s appearance, whether that be through signs of physical exertion or the impropriety of straddling of a bicycle. Kennedy Childs offered a similar opinion in his article “Training for Cycle Competitions.” Childs wrote, “for the purpose of this article the writer will, forgetful of his past flattery of the fair sex, assume its practice by the lords of creation only.”

Initially, men admonished women for riding bicycles all together, but by the 1890s, with the invention of the safety bicycle and women’s refusal to let men enjoy bicycles by themselves, men were forced to concede to women’s participation. Still, women did not immediately gain free reign to ride the bicycle in the same manner as men. Articles from the era show that men only approved of women cyclists when they were simply

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93 Ibid., 255.
participating in leisure, not strenuous efforts. Women could ride, as long as they did not
do so strenuously, or excessively. In March of 1898, the New York Central Wheelman
voted to ban women and children from participating in centuries—one hundred mile bike
rides completed in one day. The fact that the club imposed such a ban illustrates that
women were indeed capable and eager to demonstrate their own vigor.

In spite of the debate, women took to bicycles in growing numbers, actively
refuting fears that cycling would damage their bodies. By 1896, views were beginning to
change as “moderate cycling was even being recommended for expectant mothers.” In
their study of bicycles and women’s rights, Lisa S. Strange and Robert S. Brown have
argued that the safety bicycle was an important vehicle for women’s liberation.

“Heralding the bicycle as a tool of emancipation, [Elizabeth Cady] Stanton linked cycling
to dress reform, the collapse of the distinction between the public and private spheres,
and religious liberation.” Frances Willard also celebrated the bicycle in her book, A
Wheel Within a Wheel. At first, she praised it for its ability to lure young men away from
saloons and into the outdoors but after she received a bicycle as a present from Albert
Pope she soon advocated cycling as a worthwhile endeavor for women as well.

Men may have been reluctant to accept women cyclists at first, but they found a
way to counteract the threat to their masculinity through a patriarchal belief that they
could allow women access to bicycles. During this moment, cycling norms mutated in
order to accept women, as cycling became a gift that men could give to women. One
advertisement read, “These are days of doubles—two’s company—two Columbias are

96 Smith, A Social History of the Bicycle, 66.
Women’s Studies 31 (2002): 615.
98 Frances E. Willard, A Wheel Within a Wheel (Bedford: Applewood Books), 11-14.
better than one. Let that lady of yours feel as sprightly as you do. Buy her a Columbia Bicycle.” The art shows a man and woman riding side by side on their bicycles, sitting upright and socializing. This was more an act of courtship than participation in a vigorous lifestyle. In this advertisement, the manufacturer was appealing to men as patriachs by showing that their acceptance of women on bicycles would win women’s favor.

Advertisements told men to “let” their women ride bicycles but many women did not wait for approval—using the bicycle to gain opportunities for freedom and independence. While women such as Frances Willard and Elizabeth Cady Stanton employed bicycles to liberate themselves from the domestic sphere, bicycle marketing attempted to appeal to this new woman without upsetting traditionalists. Ellen Gruber Garvey argues, “The discourse of consumption constituted by the advertising articles, and fiction within the developing mass-market magazine of the 1890s subsumed both feminist and conservative views in the interest of sales. In effect, these advertising dependent magazines asserted a version of women’s bicycling that reframed its apparent social risks and benefits.”

Even as magazine advertisements and literature attempted to “diffuse the threat” by focusing on “scenarios in which [the bicycle] upheld and renewed the traditional social order” there was concern that it afforded women too much

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independence.\textsuperscript{102} There were still those who believed it was a direct threat to manhood. A poem in the \textit{Chicago Tribune} titled “In These Bicycle Days,” offered a humorous reflection of the societal changes that were occurring during the bicycle boom, as well as men’s attempts to maintain authority. One verse of the poem reads, “Peter, Peter pumpkin eater, Had a wife, and couldn’t keep her; Took an axe and smashed her bike, So she had to stay home at night.”\textsuperscript{103} Similarly, cartoons in \textit{Puck} showed a reversal of gender roles brought on by the bicycle where the husband took care of the children while the wife went for a ride (fig. 2.3).\textsuperscript{104}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{female_cyclist_cartoon.png}
\caption{A female cyclist leaves her children at home.}
\end{figure}

The bicycle’s ability to free women from their homes to enjoy the same spirit of adventurism that men enjoyed was a privilege that men were often reluctant to share.

\textsuperscript{102} Quoted in, Garvey, “Reframing the Bicycle,” 95.
\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Chicago Tribune}, "In These Bicycle Days," \textit{Outing, an Illustrated Monthly Magazine of Recreation} 29, no. 1, October, 1896, 106.
The idea that the woman's sphere was at home with the children, preparing the food while men were free to venture out into the unknown with their bicycles, was a concept that faced contention and some degree of modification.

At the turn of the century, middle-class men saw industrialized life in urban areas as a threat to ideals of manhood. The emerging “cult of fitness,” which called for exercise, often in the outdoors, could purify men of the pollution, stress, and an over-reliance on unnatural medicines found in the modern city. Nature offered a cure and there was ample propaganda from bicycle manufactures and cycling enthusiasts to promote cycling as a natural exercise and a means of getting men out of doors. A cartoon in *Puck* demonstrated how the bicycle was an “agent of reform.” In it, there are two drawings of the same man. In one, he sits in an arm chair staring at a newspaper while other papers are piled around. In the other drawing he rests on the side of a country road with his bicycle leaning against a fence. There he sits staring at a flower, pondering “nature’s book.”

Cycling was advocated as a “sanitary pastime,” which brought “health to those who by its means found themselves able to escape from the close and vitiated air of town life into the pure and life-giving air of the meadows and open fields.”

Not all men were drawn by promotions that connected the bicycle to nature and health, particularly those that did not ascribe to a strict middle-class understanding of manhood.

To some, the bicycle was an opportunity to go fast, faster than they could travel on horses, and a new exciting sport that had yet to find its limits. These men were the ones who defined their manliness through pluck and record-breaking achievements.

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They were also the men who trained for hours on end, sometimes up to six days a week, riding more than a hundred miles in a day. These men were certainly not exercising moderation. Much of their training and racing was done in the city at indoor and outdoor cycling tracks known as velodromes. The velodrome provided men the opportunity to impress spectators with their speed, muscle, and courage. Large crowds attended the races and it granted a celebrity status to the fastest riders. The spectacle that bicycle racing provided for those crowds impressed lower class ideals of manhood on spectators. These men could easily be re-imagined as laborers since they repeated the same movements over and over while trying to make them as efficient and effective as possible.  

Throughout its infancy, the bicycle was a highly contested tool, which was used not only as a vehicle for the liberation of women. It was used by white men in their struggle to reaffirm and maintain their manhood as well as black men seeking equality. Much like definitions of manliness itself, the manner in which men used the bicycle to attain manhood was not static. Concepts of manhood were mutable, just as cycling’s representation of manliness took on different aspects and extremes so that white middle-class men could continue to set themselves apart. It was the conflict over access and authority that kept manliness in a state of fluidity. Cycling provides a lens through which we can better understand the struggle for manliness that took place because it was an activity that changed to meet the shifting definitions of what it meant to be a man in modern society.

107 Thompson, *The Tour De France*, 141-179. Thompson explains how cyclists were likened unto the working class as they both participated in a culture of struggle, to the extent that cyclists were even referred to as “pedal workers.”
By the end of the nineteenth century, the bicycle appeared to be lost a great deal of cultural relevance. To be sure, the rising importance of strength and vigor in the 1890s played well for bicycle promotion. Simultaneously, however, the bicycle seemed merely a faddish means of exercise. American bicycle manufacturers’ output peaked at just over one million units in 1899, after demand had already begun to dwindle. The next few decades would find the industry desperately trying to get back to the golden days of cycling in the 1890s. Production would fail to even reach 500,000 from 1904 to 1914. Thomas Burr argues that the bust was caused by an over abundance of new companies entering the U.S. market leading to overproduction and a severe drop in prices.\textsuperscript{108} This, in turn, led to the bicycle’s loss of appeal. It is also true, however, that the bicycle came of age during a specific moment in which calls for participation in sport and physicality came from a multitude of directions. For a moment in the 1890s, before prices took their dramatic fall, the bicycle offered an opportunity for conspicuous consumption as well as a physical and psychic means of reclaiming manhood. As the fears of contracting neurasthenia subsided, the bicycle failed to fill a role that garnered mass appeal.

The dramatic boom and bust of the 1890s left an indelible impact on the bicycle industry. Within the institutional memory, there would remain not only a desire to get back to the production levels of 1896-1899, but to do so by building a consumer base that was more stable than that of the golden era. It would take until the 1910s before any sense of cohesion appeared within the industry. By that time, it was not only saddled with the problem of trying to increase the bicycle’s appeal, but to do so in the face of rising competition from the automotive industry. The attempts it would make to increase

\textsuperscript{108} Burr, \textit{Markets as Producers and Consumers}, 219-220, 234, 240.
business throughout the first half of the twentieth century were reminiscent of those discussed above. The targeted demographic, however, was decidedly changed.
In the 1910s, bicycle boosters were continuing to promote cycling as a curative for the ill effects of over-mechanization and urbanization. Magazine articles that celebrated the bicycle as a healthy activity and a means of returning to nature gave a voice to Progressive’s adulation of the yeoman farmer. One such article described a multi-day bicycle trip in which a group of riders stopped at a farmer’s house. They were happy to find food cooked and prepared “the good old-fashioned way.” There was, “None of the small, over-seasoned portions of the city restaurants often unfit to eat, and surely not the thing for the healthy appetite of a bicycle rider, but huge slices of home-made bread, with freshly churned butter, chicken, tender and cooked to a turn, with heaps and heaps of beans, corn, tomatoes and potatoes, all products of the farmer’s own bounteous fields.” The article explained that all riders had “the same intent and purpose—to get out, out into God’s own glorious country where the air is clear, the sky blue, and where they could, without fear of censor, throw aside the mask of artificial civility one is forced to assume in his daily intercourse with those that go to make up the many thousands that inhabit the great city.” There were already 154,000 miles of road in the U.S. by 1904. The bicycle provided an opportunity to travel those roads and get away from city life, where one could move about in a more natural setting at whatever pace they desired. Using the bicycle to escape the confines of the city gave one the ability to breathe “fresh air” and interact with nature personally.

110 Ibid.
What the bicycle needed in the 1910s, however, was new business, not a return to the pastoral emphasis and worn-out concentration on ideals of white middle-class masculinity that defined bicycle marketing of the 1890s. There was a growing belief that sales to middle and upper class white males were no longer enough. All members of the bicycle industry wanted to increase their business and many of the leaders believed the best way to do so was by expanding their market. Making appeals to those who appreciated nature and healthy exercise was a poor tactic for broadening the consumer base because it continued the status quo. Bicycle marketing needed to diversify, and using the same marketing tactics on the same consumer group was not the way to do so. Bicycle sales had clearly fallen over the course of ten years and the bicycle industry and retailers all desperately wanted to resurrect their product.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1898</th>
<th>1899</th>
<th>1900</th>
<th>1904</th>
<th>1909</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S. bicycle consumption</td>
<td>928,250</td>
<td>1,182,250</td>
<td>997,000</td>
<td>252,923</td>
<td>233,707</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1

In order for there to be a resurgence of cycling, different methods of marketing were necessary. The consumer of the 1910s would not respond the same way as those of

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112 Apparent consumption is the term used in the Schwinn Reporter. See: Schwinn Bicycle Company, “U.S. Bicycle Market Statistics—1895 to 1979” Schwinn Reporter (March, 1980). Census statistics estimate the physical output of bicycles to be 1.11 million in 1899, 0.23 million in 1904, 0.17 million in 1909, 0.30 million in 1914, and 0.47 million in 1919. See: Susan B. Carter et al. eds., Historical Statistics of the United States, Millennial Edition On Line (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 4-641. Tables 2.1 and 2.3 use the revised estimates provided in Bruce Epperson’s essay on bicycle production from 1878-1914. He suggests there were several years in which conventional estimates exaggerate actual output. Still, the larger trends remain the same. See: Bruce Epperson, “How Many Bikes?: An Investigation into the Quantification of Bicycling, 1878-1914” in Cycle History 11: Proceedings of the 11th International Cycling History Conference eds. Andrew Ritchie, and Rob Van der Plas (San Francisco: Van der Plas, 2001), 49.
the 1890s. The industry could no longer count on the cycling fad or public fascination with bicycles now that bigger, faster machines at increasingly affordable prices were on the horizon. Even those who praised the virtues of cycling referred to it as the “old bicycle.” Automobiles changed the way people thought about movement. Initially considered a rich man’s toy, automobiles proved to be more than a passing curiosity. Members of the bicycle industry soon took notice. In an attempt to quell fears that the bicycle’s day was done, bicycle supporters supplied evidence that cycling was still more popular than cars. One article, “More Bicycles than Other Vehicles” informed readers that of the 2,681 tags issued in Richmond, Indiana, 1,254 were to bicycle riders. “One-horse rigs” accounted for 840 of the tags while only 245 belonged to automobile owners and another 52 for motorcycles.\textsuperscript{113} The number of cars registered each year compared with the number of bicycles purchased, however, suggests that the days of bicycles outnumbering automobiles on city streets were quickly coming to a close (table 3.3).

There were merely 8,000 registered automobiles in the U.S. in 1900 but by 1909 that number would reach 306,000. By 1919, it had grown to 6,679,000.\textsuperscript{114} From 1904 to 1907, the average sales price of automobiles rose steadily but it began to fall by 1908.\textsuperscript{115} In 1912, the average price of a car was $1,083—the lowest it had been since 1903. In response, sales soared.\textsuperscript{116}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{113} “More Bicycles Than Other Vehicles” The Bicycling World Motorcycle Review, October 21, 1911, 205.
\textsuperscript{115} Automobile (July 25, 1912): 165; Michael L. Bromley, William Howard Taft and the First Motoring Presidency (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2003), 387.
\textsuperscript{116} Model T prices and sales come from Clay McShane, Down the Asphalt Path: The Automobile and the American City (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 135.
\end{footnotes}
This combination of decreasing prices with increasing reliability spawned a long span of sustained growth for the automotive industry. The number of cars registered in 1919 was twenty-one times the number in 1909. Car sales were quickly outpacing bicycle sales, a development that sent shockwaves of panic through the bicycle industry.
### Bicycle and Automobile Sales 1909-1919

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Bicycle consumption</th>
<th>Cars Registered</th>
<th>Increase in registration</th>
<th>Cars Produced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>233,707</td>
<td>306,000</td>
<td>112,000</td>
<td>127,731</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>388,148</td>
<td>458,000</td>
<td>152,000</td>
<td>181,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>393,894</td>
<td>619,000</td>
<td>161,000</td>
<td>199,319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>426,561</td>
<td>902,000</td>
<td>283,000</td>
<td>356,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>464,080</td>
<td>1,190,000</td>
<td>907,000</td>
<td>461,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>398,899</td>
<td>1,664,000</td>
<td>474,000</td>
<td>543,679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>……</td>
<td>2,332,000</td>
<td>668,000</td>
<td>895,930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>526,076</td>
<td>3,368,000</td>
<td>1,036,000</td>
<td>1,525,578</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>606,918</td>
<td>4,727,000</td>
<td>1,359,000</td>
<td>……</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>567,207</td>
<td>5,555,000</td>
<td>828,000</td>
<td>……</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>479,163</td>
<td>6,679,000</td>
<td>1,124,000</td>
<td>……</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3.3**

Increased bicycle sales during the second half of the 1910s show that the automobile had yet to supplant the bicycle entirely. Even though bicycle sales of the 1910s were not on par with those of the 1890s, cycling continued to garner some interest. In the sporting world, for instance, cycling had diminished but not disappeared. Six-day and other track races continued to enjoy sizeable crowds in the 1910s through the 1930s. A *New York Times* feature, “Topic of the Times” questioned whether this fact alone meant people were excited about bicycles. With the headline, “Hypnotized by the Thousands” the article proclaimed that a “duller and less pleasing spectacle” than six-day...
races was unimaginable.\textsuperscript{117} It suggested that spectators were simply in the habit of going to the races. They did not find the races exciting. Rather, it was the thought that thousands of other people would be present. Therefore, attendees were merely demonstrating a desire to attend social functions, not an interest in exercise, health, or even bicycles.\textsuperscript{118} According to this view, even though six-day bicycle races continued to enjoy a degree of popularity, there would not necessarily be a correlation in bicycle sales. Even if those attending the races were interested in cycling, the bicycle industry itself seemed less confident that the bicycle could continue to appeal to consumers without intervention.

Trade magazine articles and haphazard, often contradictory, marketing strategies throughout the 1910s reveal a genuine sense of concern among members of the bicycle industry. Bicycle boosters’ search of a solution to declining sales would send sales tactics in a myriad of directions. No longer new and exciting, the industry struggled to define the bicycle in a way that kept it relevant. This was a period of trial and error that led the industry on a course that would forever shape the way Americans thought about bicycles. The automobile’s impact on ideals of mobility necessitated a response from the bicycle industry. The one given was confused and unable to achieve the desired results—restoring sales to levels achieved during the cycling boom of the 1890s.

In spite of the mixed messages industry leaders and merchants were sending, the anxiety aroused by declining sales helped initiate a cooperative bicycle boosting campaign by 1915. At this point, the industry began devoting more attention to bicycle marketing than ever before. Yet fluctuations in bicycle sales often seemed beyond the

\textsuperscript{118} David Herlihy, \textit{Bicycle: The History} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 377, 380. Herlihy speculates, and is likely correct, that people were also attending races for gambling opportunities.
industry’s control. Advertising and marketing were certainly important, but it was also apparent that changing ideals of mobility influenced the bicycle’s successes and failures over the years. The geographer Tim Cresswell argues that new dances such as the Can-Can and the mechanization of corporeal labor resulting from Taylorism represent developments that were “symptomatic of wider changes in the sense of movement.”\textsuperscript{119} The automobile was a critical component in that widening sense of movement. As it achieved faster speeds and the capability to travel greater distances, the car became the standard by which all other forms of mobility were measured. Encapsulated in this sense of mobility were ideals of race, gender, class, and citizenship.

Cresswell uses Supreme Court cases beginning in 1865 to show how “judges . . . have argued that mobility is a ‘fundamental’ or ‘virtually unconditional’ aspect of liberty and citizenship despite the lack of formal protection in the Constitution.”\textsuperscript{120} With decreasing prices came changing views of the automobile. The car was associated with effenines during its formative years, when it was merely a form of conspicuous consumption and fashionability. As cars made their way into the driveways of the lower classes, they became more representative of masculine characteristics.\textsuperscript{121} At the same time, the automobile also began to represent American national identity. In his cultural history of the car, Cotton Seiler argues, “In the first generation of motor touring narratives, we see automobility sanctioned as a vehicle of individual and national

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 159.
\textsuperscript{121} Cotten Seiler, \textit{Republic of Drivers: A Cultural History of Automobility in America} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 54. Like masculine associations with cycling in the 1890s, those of the automobile were certainly soon challenged by women, who used cars to “break down the gender segregation of modern life.” Michael McGerr, \textit{A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in American, 1870-1920} (New York: Free Press, 2003), 231.
renascence—a means to resuscitate republican selfhood and reopen the frontier.”¹²² The public and federal sanctioning of the automobile, which widened the conception of mobility, required a reworking of all other forms of movement. For the bicycle, this process would take more than a decade.

While cars had been growing in number on American roads steadily since 1900, the official endorsement they were given by President Taft in 1909 coincided with a 101% increase in automobile production—the largest increase in production in the fifteen years from 1901-1916.¹²³ Whereas Theodore Roosevelt refused to own a car, the White House garage included several cars and chauffeurs under Taft. He publicly celebrated the car declaring, “I am sure the automobile coming in as a toy of the wealthier class is going to prove the most useful of them all to all classes, rich and poor.”¹²⁴ Seiler argues that the “first substantial federal commitment to automobility” occurred in 1916 with the Federal-Aid Road Act, “which approved $75 million in matching funds for distribution among the states.”¹²⁵ The decision to pass the Federal-Aid Road Act of 1916 was undoubtedly influenced by the two million plus cars registered in 1915.

The definitions of bicycles and motorcycles, as codified by law, hinged on definitions of the automobile. These definitions would shape the way citizens thought about movement and have an impact on sales. The decision of whether police departments and state legislatures should consider the bicycle a vehicle played out in numerous states during the first years of the twentieth century. A cartoon commenting on one such debate pictured a character resembling an orangutan dressed in a police uniform

¹²² Seiler, Republic of Drivers, 47.
¹²³ Bromley, William Howard Taft and the First Motoring Presidency, 387.
¹²⁴ Quoted in Bromley, William Howard Taft and the First Motoring Presidency, 5.
¹²⁵ Seiler, Republic of Drivers, 64.
holding a small bicycle in his hand. He asked, “What is that thing anyway?” The caption below the image explained, “New Haven, Conn., police want to know if a bicycle is a vehicle.” Similar debates were occurring in Providence, Rhode Island and Springfield, Massachusetts. Another cartoon pictured a man resembling a Puritan looking over a motorcycle with sidecar. He commented, “That looks like an automobile to me.” The accompanying caption read, “The Massachusetts legislature needs an oculist badly.” In both instances, the important question was how to classify bicycles and motorcycles in light of the growing production and consumption of automobiles. Classifying bicycles as vehicles would make them subject to many of the same regulations as automobiles, such as licenses, tolls, taxes, and safety precautions. Such was the case in New Jersey where all bicycles were required to have a lamp kept lit from one-half hour after sunset to one-half hour before sunrise and an audible signal. Increased regulation came with consequences but the alternative was potentially worse. If bicycles were considered something other than a vehicle their legitimacy as a form of transportation would be called into question with the implication that they were simply for exercise or recreation. Cotton Seiler argues, “The flattering image of the automobile entailed, in turn, a general disparagement of the automobile’s ancestor and erstwhile rival, the locomotive.” The same was certainly true of the bicycle. Judging all other forms of movement in relation to the automobile conferred a hierarchy of movement in which the car was king.

126 “Week’s Doings Portrayed in Pen Drawings” Motorcycling, December 14, 1914, 3.
127 Ibid.
128 “New Haven Asks, What is a Bicycle?” Motorcycling, December 14, 1914, 43.
129 Ibid.
131 Seiler, Republic of Drivers, 46.
The way a bicycle was defined and the safety regulations it was subject to were not the only influential developments beyond the bicycle industry’s control. Another issue of great importance to bicycle sales, domestically and abroad, was the tariff placed on them. The tariff issue went beyond bicycle sales. Calls for lower rates came from farmers and others who wanted to see the duties on goods they exported lowered but they were thwarted by Grover Cleveland and averted by Theodore Roosevelt. Taft campaigned on tariff reform but the Payne-Aldrich Act he signed came out of the legislature heavily revised by “protectionists” who favored the high tariff to cut down on competition. The act that emerged “saw prevailing duties firmly re-established, if not actually raised.”

Real tariff reform would come under President Wilson with the Underwood tariff act in September 1913. Wilson declared, “The object of the tariff duties henceforth laid must be effective competition, the whetting of American wits by contest with the wits of the rest of the world.”

The motorcycle and bicycle industry was understandably concerned about the potential effects.

A quarterly report issued by the Department of Commerce regarding imported materials and U.S. consumption of those materials compared the effects of lowered import duties on motorcycles and bicycles. There were fears were that lowered import duties would lead to increased competition from foreign manufacturers by flooding the U.S. market with imported goods and a likely lowering of prices, undercutting those produced domestically. The resulting increase in imports of motorcycles, however, was not quite as drastic as it was with bicycles. When the duty on motorcycles was decreased from 45% to 25%, “imports did not take the jump that might generally have been looked

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133 Quoted in Dulles, *The United States Since 1865*, 213.
for. . . . On the other hand, immediately upon the reduction from 45% to 25% in import
duty on bicycles and finished parts thereof, imports showed a striking increase.” The
value of bicycles and parts thereof imported in the July 1 to October 3 quarter of 1913
when the duty was 45% was $12,095. When that duty was lowered to 25% for the last
quarter of 1913 the value of bicycles imported rose to $65,640.134 It is clear that the
higher import duty of 45% was indeed protecting American bicycle and parts
manufactures from foreign competition. That foreign competition, however, came
mostly from Germany and a few other European countries soon to be embroiled in World
War I. Subsequently, their metals and other materials used for bicycle production would
be consumed strictly for militaristic purposes. This greatly reduced the competition
American bicycle manufacturers faced.

World War I was of benefit to the U.S. bicycle industry in other ways as well.
While there was a reduction on the duties for imports, U.S. manufactures also enjoyed
relaxed regulations on exports. This was especially important during the War. By 1915,
much of the manufacturing and production of goods not specifically needed for war in
European countries were dwindling in supply. Not only would those countries involved
in the war effort have few materials and workers to produce bicycles to export to the
U.S., but they would also have fewer for their own citizenry. The increased need in
Europe and eventual entrance of the U.S. into the war led to a period of “enormous
industrial and agricultural expansion” that lasted from 1915 to 1920.135 Neutrality and

134 “Some Figures on the Cycle Trade” Motorcycling, October 26, 1914, 8. U.S. manufacturers had
enjoyed a high protective tariff for a number of years but progressive calls for a lower tariff, in support of
farmers, brought about the Payne-Aldrich tariff under Taft in 1909 but it was a tariff of compromise that
did little other than split the Republican party. The Underwood-Simmons Tariff of 1913, inacted under
Woodrow Wilson, finally reduced the duties, which is the reason bicycle and motorcycle duties dropped
from 45% to 25%.
mobilization were both a boon to the U.S. bicycle industry. The cover of the trade magazine *Motorcycling* included a picture of Uncle Sam holding a bicycle and a motorcycle with a caption that read, “Is Uncle Sam to land a good slice of motorcycle and bicycle business from other countries? It looks so now, since the Washington authorities have ruled that cycles can be shipped without hindrance by our own authorities.”

Another article triumphantly announced, “Record Foreign Trade: Motorcycles and Bicycles Shipped Abroad Show Great Increase.” While bicycles shipped abroad were at “unprecedented” levels, the article was also happy to announce, “Turning to the import side we are taking fewer motorcycles and bicycles than at any time in years. Just a few machines are coming in, directly due to the fact that all foreign made machines are being commandeered for war purposes.”

The prosperity of the wartime economy also meant that bicycle retailers might make more sales to skilled laborers. Skilled workers saw their wages increase at the same time some of them were seeing the number of hours they worked fall. The average wage per hour, excluding agriculture, was slightly up from 1914 but it would continue to rise to a nearly 80 percent increase by 1919. Of course, leaders of the bicycle industry were quick to tell merchants of this exciting opportunity to sell more bikes. By August of 1915, *MotorCycling and Bicycling* was informing merchants that skilled laborers had more wages and more free time on their hands than they had ever had. One article asked bicycle dealers, “Doesn’t it signify that these men, who are your best customers for

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136 Cover *Motorcycling* Vol. 9, No. 17, October 26, 1914.
137 “Record Foreign Trade” *MotorCycling and Bicycling* August 16, 1915), 1.
138 Ibid., 2.
139 William E. Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914-32* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 16. Leuchtenburg writes, “The outbreak of war in Europe at first produced a serious economic recession in the country, but by the spring of 1915 Allied war orders were stoking American industry and opening up new markets for farm products.”
140 Ibid.
motorcycles and bicycles, are now in position to buy these vehicles? Doesn’t it tell you that this is the rising tide for your business? This was an admission that working men were more likely to purchase bicycles than elites. Merchants were told to be patient, that if the heightened sales had not made it to their store yet, they would and that “The pressure for labor is steadily moving westward. If it hasn’t struck your town now, it will within a month.” The magazine suggested that these dealers should seek to establish good relationships with local factories so that they might have an “in” when factory production picked up. The suggestion that dealers concentrate on skilled workers and the middle-class presented an opportunity for dealers to create new customers who were more likely to continue riding and buying bicycles after the war was over, provided the prosperity continued.

Another aspect of the war that was beneficial to cycling manufacturers was the culture of sacrifice inspired by the war effort. Educators even incorporated the themes of “patriotism, heroism, and sacrifice” into elementary school classrooms. Herbert Hoover, who was appointed Food Administrator by President Wilson in May 1917, proposed to dictate food policy by “Mobiliz[ing] the spirit of self-denial and self-sacrifice.” Hoover gained popularity by encouraging households to voluntarily participate in “meatless” and “wheatless” days rather than enacting a policy of food rationing.

The historian Foster Rhea Dulles argues the public response was

141 “Good Steady Wages Mean More Sales” MotorCycling and Bicycling, August 23, 1915, 12.
142 Ibid.
145 Kennedy, Over Here, 118.
“wholehearted and enthusiastic.”\textsuperscript{146} The idea that the citizenry should tighten up their belts and make do with what was available as an expression of their patriotism provided an excellent marketing opportunity for the bicycle industry. A particularly clever advertising and public relations campaign heralded cycling as patriotic. L. Stanton Pugh’s article, “Ride a Bicycle and Do Your Bit” explained that in light of the “possibility of the government issuing ‘gasoline tickets’ to the joy-riding autoists, limiting the individual car owner to one gallon a week, it seems a most opportune time for the bicycle’s appeal to patriotism.”\textsuperscript{147}

Pugh suggested that pleasure-riding in automobiles was unpatriotic. He also took the moment to argue, “A false pride has tended to convey the impression that the bicycle implies a loss of social prestige; this however, is refuted by the ever-increasing numbers of the elite who are taking up the bicycle at such aristocratic resorts as Palm Beach, Florida.”\textsuperscript{148} His comments reveal a shift in consumer society where elite status was now conferred by automobile consumption. As a result, the bicycle had moved down-market. While Pugh acknowledged people commonly perceived they bicycle as having been downgraded in status, he believed elites were coming back to cycling as an expression of their patriotism. Since this article was written for a trade magazine, however, and not the general public, the goal was not to admonish U.S. consumers for their misperception but instead to suggest to bicycle retailers that a great opportunity was coming their way. It concluded, “This then is the opportune time for dealers throughout the country to make a

\textsuperscript{146} Dulles, \textit{The United States since 1865}, 261.
\textsuperscript{147} L. Stanton Pugh “Ride a Bicycle and Do Your Bit” \textit{MotorCycling and Bicycling}, July 30, 1917, 37.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid.
decisive appeal to the patriotism of the public. A new field opens before the dealer, made possible and directly attributable to the war.”

A few months later, *MotorCycling and Bicycling* encouraged retailers to market bicycles as synonymous with patriotism. A two page article titled “A Cycle Sign of the Times, Society Women ‘Hooverize’ by Going Back to the Bicycle” was included, complete with four large photos of well-dressed ladies and details about how four women of St. Paul, Minnesota, were back to riding bikes like “their sisters twenty years ago. . . .” The article informed readers that this revival of cycling among “society” women was also occurring in Palm Beach, Newport, R.I., Lenox, Mass., and Bar Harbor, Maine. It added that this trend started in Palm Beach a few seasons prior “but war conditions have added their impetus all over the country. Like their sisters in England and including the nobility and members of the Royal family, American society women have made a war sacrifice by laying up their autos and substituting the efficient and economical bicycle. Dealers should help this along.” This was, no doubt, a great idea for marketing bicycles during the war and made excellent use of the heightened sense of patriotism at the time, as it made a subtle point about making small sacrifices for the sake of the war effort. After all, the idea that women should make sacrifices for the improvement of their country was a fundamental precept of idealized notions about republican motherhood. Still, using the culture of sacrifice to promote bicycles was rather myopic.

If society women were simply substituting the bicycle because it was efficient and economical, what would be the point of riding bicycles once the war was over?

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149 Ibid.
150 “A Cycle Sign of the Times, Society Women ‘Hooverize’ by Going Back to the Bicycle” *MotorCycling and Bicycling*, October 22, 1917, 24-5. To “Hooverize” was a popular expression, at the time—because of Herbert Hoover’s actions as head of the U.S. Food Administration—meaning to make sacrifices for the war effort.
151 Ibid., 25.
Obviously, women of this class, and their husbands, would not be too concerned with what was economical. In fact, it would be their decisions to partake in activities and practices that were not economical that would set them apart from the lower classes. The wartime appeals to patriotism played too heavily on notions of sacrifice and therefore only helped contribute to the diminished status of the bicycle among the well-to-do. After the war ended, there was apparently no reason for them to continue riding bicycles. The end of the war meant a “return to normalcy” and citizens’ return to spending freely, not concerning themselves with sacrifice or conservation.

The bicycle industry was also affected by the war in other ways. Business was going so well for the New Departure Company in 1915 that their factories were running 23 hours a day and they were forced to expand their facilities.\textsuperscript{152} C. F. Olin, the manager of advertising for the firm reported, “Our increased business is to some extent due to the war in stopping of the supply of European made bearings . . . But the principal reason is that we are working on orders received before the war, indicating that we are making bearings equal to the best in the world and satisfactory to our customers.”\textsuperscript{153} Olin also posited that New Departure’s success was potentially due to their new and vigorous advertising campaign. The explanation of the war’s role in stopping the supply of European bearings, however, called the effectiveness of advertising into question. It also highlighted another way in which the ebb and flow of the U.S. bicycle industry was affected by factors beyond its control. The war was not only good for U.S. bicycles traveling abroad, but also those sold domestically as governmental entities incorporated bicycles into their services.

\textsuperscript{152} “New Departure Expands” \textit{MotorCycling and Bicycling}, August 16, 1915, 2.
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid.
The bicycle industry profited from bicycle purchases for police officers, mail carriers, and even soldiers—all who were reportedly able to do their jobs more efficiently. The New York Police Department bought “several hundred bicycles” in the spring of 1915. The bicycle police proved so successful that the *New York Times* ran an article about their effectiveness, which *Bicycle News* then quoted so that members of the bicycle industry could have something to be proud of but also to suggest that merchants sell bicycles to police officers in their own communities. Capitalizing on the efficiency of wheeled transport, there was also a comment about the New Yorkers’ favorable impression of bicycle-mounted police officers because of their increased productivity. Residents made such comments as, “The bicycle corps, both pedal and motorcycle, is the finest idea ever put into practice. . . . [E]ach man can cover more ground than ten of the ordinary patrolmen.”¹⁵⁴ Because bicycle police could travel faster and further than they could on foot, many areas of the city soon took notice of the difference the bicycle made—some who never saw a policeman in a year were beginning to see them on a regular basis.¹⁵⁵ The police were using the bicycle to venture further out into their districts and to some, it made a difference in crime rates. M.K. Nash, the field secretary of the Staten Island civic league said, “Unlike all other summers, there was no ‘crime wave’ this year. It never got started. The police and detectives were on the job, and the crooks and light-fingered gentry have found it almost impossible to operate profitably.”¹⁵⁶

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¹⁵⁵ Ibid.
¹⁵⁶ Ibid.
Police in Salt Lake City and Kalamazoo were also using the bicycle to great effect.\textsuperscript{157} A police sergeant pointed out the advantages of the bicycle over other forms of transportation to local reporters asking, “Do you think a housebreaker or safe blower would hear me coming on that machine of mine . . . not on your life. But let me come panting and chugging on a motorcycle or in an automobile and see how near I get to them.”\textsuperscript{158} He also pointed out how no man on foot could outrun him on his bicycle. It is unclear whether he purchased his own bicycle or the police department supplied it. Regardless, he provided an argument that the police could use bicycles to stop crime more effectively. Trade magazines made sure to play up the advantages of the bicycle over the car or motorcycle for this particular task. The prospect of police using bicycles was not only beneficial to the bicycle industry due to increased sales, but it was also an important promotional opportunity. As a symbol of respect and heroism, these officers were moving advertisements for the bicycle. Because of expectations that police officers should be able to get from one place to the next quickly, their use of the bicycle demonstrated that it was not an outmoded form of transportation; it was a source of civic improvement.

Another area in which the bicycle could help employees within the governmental sector was mail delivery. Unlike police forces, however, there was a degree of anti-bicycle sentiment at the top-tier of the postal service. In 1915, Postmaster General Albert S. Burleson made a decision to prohibit mail carriers from using the bicycle in the Rural Free Delivery system (FRD) on the basis that they were impractical.\textsuperscript{159} This, of course,

\textsuperscript{157} A picture of the Salt Lake City police force and their Pierce bicycles is included in \textit{MotorCycling and Bicycling}, July 23, 1917, 23.
\textsuperscript{158} “True to His Old Love” \textit{Motorcycling and Bicycling}, July 26, 1915, 49.
\textsuperscript{159} Frank A. Eagan “From the Inside Looking Out” \textit{Bicycle News} I no. 7 October 1915, 25.
was upsetting for members of the cycling industry. Both the bicycle and motorcycle industry had hopes of making good use of the 41,500 Rural Free Delivery carriers covering 1,007,000 miles a day serving 21,500,000 people.\textsuperscript{160} An article in *The Bicycling World and Motorcycle Review* in 1911 described the RFD as a “field that affords great possibilities” not only because of the nature of their job—the average route spanned 25 miles—but also because of their pay. The minimum salary for an RFD carrier was $440 a year but the average salary was $965.\textsuperscript{161} Members of the bicycle industry were truly upset about the lost opportunity resulting from Burleson’s decision. Frank Eagan, a bicycle booster, responded, “Why should the poor, underpaid postman at Hick’s Corners be permitted to deliver his mail in one-fifth the time he could if he walked . . .? Any rural postman who is so radical as to forsake shank’s mare for a bicycle should be disciplined and your Uncle Burleson is the man to do it, by gosh!”\textsuperscript{162} He suggested that the Postmaster General go ahead and remove the bicycle from the special delivery stamp as well. Any governmentally endorsed use of the bicycle was of course great for the industry but any rejection or specific action against using the bicycle in official capacities was a slap in the face.

The motorcycle and bicycle industry immediately reacted to the Postmaster-General’s decision. T.W. Henderson, the President of the Motorcycle Manufacturers’ association planned to have a meeting in the same city as the planned meeting of the National R.F.D. Association on the same date. The hope was that together, they could persuade Burleson to reconsider his decision. In publicizing the meeting, Henderson

\textsuperscript{160} “Motorcycles on RFD prove Profitable” *The Bicycling World and Motorcycle Review*, LXIV no. 5 October 21, 1911, 199.
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{162} Frank A. Eagan “From the Inside Looking Out” *Bicycle News*, I no. 7 October 1915, 25.
tried to convey the urgency of the situation to other members of the motorcycling and bicycling industry. He argued, “It is urgent not only from the standpoint of the possible loss of the R.F.D. business but from the very bad psychological effect that would result from the unfavorable publicity which this action would be sure to inspire.” The publicity was critical because Burleson barred the use of motorcycles and bicycles in mail delivery on the basis that they were impractical, particularly when it was raining. This directly contradicted a large part of the cycling industry’s campaign to promote the bicycle as practical in nearly every situation. This was worsened by the fact that Burleson’s new regulation gave approval to the use of automobiles, if “permission [was] obtained from a regular schedule approved by the department and where road conditions [would] allow uninterrupted service during a large part of the year.” The last stipulation, as well as Burleson’s belief that motorcycles and bicycles would get stuck or prove useless on muddy roads suggests that his primary concern was that the mail be delivered. However, his argument that, in the case of bicycle and motorcycle deliveries, the materials would be unprotected from the elements demonstrated a lack of understanding. Cars would not be fully enclosed until the 1920s and the use of horses left carriers just as exposed to the elements as they would be on a bicycle or motorcycle. The motorcycle industry quickly pointed out that with the use of a side-car, materials could be just as protected as they could in an automobile. Even those carrying mail via bicycle could devise a water and wind resistant vessel for the mail. The belief was that the carrying capacity of a motorcycle or bicycle was insufficient. An issue that was even more important, however, was the potential for accidents. This was especially the case

164 Ibid., 2.
165 Ibid., 1.
since an Act of March 9, 1914 entitled carriers to compensation in case of injury or death. Burleson’s decision certainly stung—when a major component of the industry’s marketing strategy revolved around the bicycle’s efficiency and convenience.

Undaunted, members of the bicycle industry continued their concerted effort to promote bicycles as efficient by marketing them as a way to increase business productivity. “Bicycle Usefulness in Business,” told of The Pusch Grocery store, which had gone from using two trucks for grocery deliveries to one truck and one bicycle. It used the truck for larger orders and the bicycle for the deliveries that were “within a radius of one mile of the store.” Stories also spoke of how doctors were using bicycles to make house calls while others included pictures of messenger boys with bicycles to show business owners how they might use the bicycle to conduct business more effectively. A series of advertisements for the New Departure company identified potential customers based on their occupations and explained how the bicycle aided them in their employment. The series included “the shopman, lawyer’s clerk, bellhop, policeman, jobber salesman, and mail boy” among others, as customers to target.

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166 Ibid.
168 These ads appear in nearly every issue of Motorcycling and Bicycling in 1917.
While the Postmaster-General may have been unconvinced of the bicycle’s practicality, the United States government was more open to the idea. The Pope Manufacturing Company, which had been trying to persuade the government of the bicycle’s utility in war since 1891, had good reason to be excited.\(^{169}\) In October 1917, the company was awarded a contract to provide 10,000 bicycles for the war effort.

\(^{169}\) Herlihy, *Bicycle*, 258. Pope donated 40 bicycles to the Connecticut National Guard in 1891 to prove their practicality. The First Signal Corps “confirmed that bicycles ‘could bring reinforcements into the field quickly and silently’ and convey messages when ‘signaling or other means of communications are impractical.’”
“mostly for messenger and dispatch work.”\textsuperscript{170} While this was certainly good news for the Pope Company—10,000 bikes would have represented a significant portion of their yearly output—even better news came in the next issue of \textit{MotorCycling and Bicycling}, which informed readers that the U.S. government was now going to buy 100,000 bicycles. This order represented nearly one sixth of the total sales in 1917, which totaled 606,918.\textsuperscript{171} Because this was such a substantial order and the time specified for its fulfillment was relatively fast, the order required that nearly every willing American bicycle manufacturer take part in the project. Col. George Pope of the Bicycle Manufacturers Association (BMA) and Walter Rinck of the United Cycling Trade Directorate assisted the government in distributing the workload among the industry and overseeing the project.\textsuperscript{172}

Aside from the obvious benefit derived from an immediate increase in revenue, the governmental contract for 100,000 bicycles would also provide a promotional benefit. A soldier’s use of the bicycle to aid in the war effort was a welcome endorsement of the utilitarian benefits of bicycles. The same was true of using bicycles for delivering the mail, groceries, or medical assistance to the community. Each instance was a testament to the usefulness of a bicycle and a subtle reminder that there were times when the bicycle was indeed more practical than any other form of movement. This was another form of validation for an industry that had become increasingly insecure in light of the growing popularity of automobiles. Cars and trucks had obvious advantages over bicycles and so the bicycle industry struggled to find a proper niche. It focused on those

\textsuperscript{170} “Pope Gets Contract for 10,000 War Bikes” \textit{MotorCycling and Bicycling}, October 29, 1917, 14.
\textsuperscript{172} “U.S. to Buy 100,000 Bicycles for War” \textit{MotorCycling and Bicycling}, November 5, 1917, 10.
who needed to make short trips with a lot of stops and in the case of the army, a vehicle that could mobilize hundreds at the lowest price using the least amount of materials. At the time, a Model T cost around $360 while Sears & Roebuck advertised Kenwood bicycles for $16.95.\textsuperscript{173} An added benefit was that when roads were impassable by wheel, the bicycle could be pushed or carried, whereas the automobile would be forced to turn around or simply be abandoned. With the announcement that the United States Army was going to purchase 100,000 bicycles, the industry had good reason to be excited. It was not necessarily excited because its own marketing worked but rather because of the marketing opportunities troops on bicycles would provide. In essence, this was more of a windfall than a product of the industry’s efforts. Whether governmental entities such as the RFD or Army would embrace the bicycle was mostly beyond the industry’s control.

As for matters that were within its control, the bicycle industry suggested the use of universal tactics to sell bikes even though it was acutely aware that different locales and populations required different marketing strategies. The trade journals of the era reveal marketing trends, but they also show that, to an extent, industry leaders were suggesting any and every conceivable tactic. The bottom line was that they wanted to sell bikes to as many people as possible. Still, there was a palpable fear of directly marketing to people who were not white. The assumption that this was purely a by-product of class—because many non-whites did not make enough money to afford bicycles—is questionable because merchants were in fact making appeals to “working men.” It is also true that even though the industry did not specifically target minority cyclists such as African Americans, the trade magazines show that black riders, black

bicycle races, and black cycling clubs did indeed exist. News about those riders seldom appeared in the major magazines.\textsuperscript{174}

The fear among both bicycle and motorcycle dealers was that African Americans’ participation in the activity would be detrimental for overall sales. An article entitled “Twixt the Nigger and the Devil” calls attention to the fact that dealers were reportedly “opposed to negroes riding motorcycles, as it is feared that recklessness in riding and the speed mania will get the best of them and they will do the trade more harm than good by disgusting white prospects.”\textsuperscript{175} This fear that diversifying their appeals would cause a forfeiture of other demographics was a powerful force. Operating under the assumption that consumer patterns would spread from the top down, the bicycle industry demonstrated their own ideals about the racial and gender ordering of American consumers. First, it targeted elite white males, then the middle-class before broadening appeals to lower classes, but never made the move to non-whites—regardless of class. By the time bicycle boosters made appeals to the working class, they also felt comfortable marketing bicycles to women.

Due to a slight increase in sales in 1913 and 1914, the bicycle industry was convinced that things would soon turn around. It was just a matter of time, the industry hoped, before the bicycle was just as popular as it had been in the 1890s, but with more stability and even better sales—since the population in the U.S. was quickly growing. Still, sales were not nearly as good as they were fifteen years earlier. With a goal of complete recovery, the industry not only targeted business owners, it also used trade magazines to encourage bicycle merchants to consider female customers. Articles about

\textsuperscript{174} At a time when the United States was embroiled in heightened racial violence perpetrated against African-Americans, the black cycling clubs and the races the sponsored were segregated.

\textsuperscript{175} “Twixt Nigger and the Devil” Motorcycling October 26, 1914, 8.
women’s enjoyment of the bicycle and advertisements directed specifically at women became more prevalent. Women had long been riding bicycles but advertisements still treated them as an afterthought, since ads spoke more to white masculine ideals. This alteration of tactics was somewhat logical since it was becoming more apparent to the industry that it needed to diversify advertisements in order to draw customers from a broader portion of society. More importantly, the industry proved more willing to rework marketing strategies to embrace shifting gender ideals than it was willing to market their product to the lower classes in national advertising campaigns. After all, this tactic of marketing to women was now more feasible because of the increase in women’s independence and the growing number of women with jobs. By World War I, two million women were working in business offices and when mobilization created a shortage of labor, they stepped into positions they had never before occupied.\footnote{Leuchtenburg, \textit{The Perils of Prosperity}, 159.} If Americans had clung tightly to Victorian ideals, or the notion of separate spheres, marketing bicycles to women would have been entirely illogical.

Trade magazine articles scolded merchants for all their talk about the comeback of the bicycle and hopes that a resurgence in velodrome races, road races, tours and club runs would save the industry while others were actively working to create new business. In spite of those that were trying to create new business, one bicycle booster suggested that \textit{everyone} was failing to pay attention to women. He called readers’ attention to the neglect of the female market by including a letter from Mrs. H.S. Darrall who wrote, “There are so many ladies whom I know who wish so much to ride bicycles again, but have not the nerve to start the style. If some impetus was given they would certainly start
like a pack of sheep.” The notion that the bicycle was appealing because of the independence it afforded women was somewhat contradicted by such appeals that treated women as mindless followers.

Dealers were told all they needed to do to sell women’s bicycles was, “dig out that woman’s machine you have in the back room, wipe the dust off it and put it in the place of honor in the show window. It has been so long since most of the women in your town have seen a bicycle built for skirts that they have almost forgotten there is such a thing. Get your wife or daughter or sister to start the style of riding.” As far as dealers’ unwillingness or laziness in marketing their product to women was concerned, the article continued, “Thousands upon thousands of dollars have been expended in advertising campaigns but the proportion devoted to attracting women riders has been so small that few have noticed it, certainly not the women.” It is apparent that the industry was becoming fully cognizant of the need to target women as consumers, but this article shows that not all manufacturers and merchants had taken industry leaders’ advice.

Another article gave notice that “society women” were taking up the bicycle. It boasted, “There has been a growing demand for bicycles by women riders ever since the spring of 1915.” It went on to explain, “The women of Evanston, one of the stylish suburbs of Chicago, are returning to the bicycle for pleasure, health and exercise. Automobiles, carriages and horseback riding are in the discard and the ladies may be seen

177 “Big Opportunity for the Bicycle Dealers” MotorCycling and Bicycling, August 2, 1915, 32.
178 Ibid.
179 Ibid.
daily on the streets both on errands and seeking exercise and recreation.” The emphasis on the fact that they were women of a “stylish” neighborhood is of particular note because again, here the author is operating under the logic that if elites bought bicycles the lower classes would follow. In fact, the article concluded by stating, “Now that society has once more taken to the wheel all that remains is for the live dealers to get busy and land the business while it is to be had.”

Bicycle sales also experienced some benefits from the growing enrollment rate of women in college. In “Why College Girls Ride Bicycles,” Elizabeth Skelding Moore explained that the women of Smith College had taken to the bicycle because it allowed them to go anywhere they wanted, “unlike an automobile.” This was not simply about women’s ability to get around college campuses easily. After all, most campuses were not that big at the time. Rather, as Moore goes on to explain, the women of Smith College were using the bicycle to ride out into the countryside with their friends. Forming clubs, the women would organize “parties” in the woods and encourage incoming freshmen to bring a bicycle with them to school. While it is true that this portrayal of the bicycle was somewhat played-out with regard to men, it was still new and exciting for women—who had yet to enjoy all of the same liberties as men. Moore argued that because numerous college women were taking bicycles with them to school, “bicycling among women is becoming more and more popular.” The potential of the college-aged market was somewhat important to the industry at the time, but as college

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181 “Big Opportunity for the Bicycle Dealers” *MotorCycling and Bicycling*, August 2, 1915, 32. “Live Dealers” was a term used to denote those dealers who were actively trying to boost sales opposed to those who were considered “Dead” or inactive.
183 Ibid.
enrollment increased over the next few decades—especially after World War II—the bicycle industry would give college students much more respect and attention as a consumer group than it did before.

Another important point about this article is the fact that these women, or more likely their families, had the finances to allow them to attend college, which was undoubtedly favorable to those in the bicycle industry. Not only would they have the money to afford one of the more expensive models, but there was also the thought that these women were, or would become, the trend-setters for American women.

Advertising and promotion was still operating under the assumption that what was desirable for those in the upper classes would be desirable for those of all classes. The bicycle industry expected women, as consumers, to do everything in their power to follow the most current fashion trends.

While the bicycle industry was actively trying to create new customers by going after women, they were also hopeful that the industry would be saved by the bicycle’s return to the fashionable status it enjoyed in the 1890s. More importantly, in these instances, the industry seemed more willing to accept shifting gender notions associated with the bicycle than it was with the prospect of making direct appeals to lower classes. That is not to say that the cycling industry did not want the working class buying bicycles. At this point, however, they were still hesitant to devote too much time or money on national advertising campaigns for anyone below the middle-class. Here, the maintenance of class associations with the bicycle were more important than the gendered and racial notions. Furthermore, the mention of automobiles and carriages is also important since, in both the article about the Smith College women and in the article
about society women, there is more of an overt attempt to couch appeals for the bicycle in anti-automobile language. By this, it becomes apparent that the bicycle industry and cycling supporters were increasingly threatened by the automobile. To the bicycle’s advantage, automobiles were still relatively expensive but that advantage was on the decline.\(^\text{184}\)

The bicycle industry’s effort to broaden appeals culminated in the creation of a co-operative organization named the Million Bicycles Committee (MBC). Bicycle boosters formed the MBC after an industry-wide convention in 1915 showed there was a desire for the “trade [to] establish a promotion committee to stimulate in every way possible the use and sale of bicycles.”\(^\text{185}\) An article proclaiming “Bicycle Dealers Organize” announced that on December 22, 1915, twenty-nine members of the bicycle industry met at the YMCA in Cleveland, Ohio, to organize this “association for the purpose of reviving and stimulating the bicycle trade throughout the United States.”\(^\text{186}\) The MBC’s primary objective was to sell one million bicycles in 1916. The New Departure Manufacturing company, who specialized in coaster brakes—an accessory that greatly improved the safety of cycling—was a leader in this promotional organization and an “exemplification of the genuine booster spirit to the nth degree.”\(^\text{187}\) In order to help boost bicycles a “comprehensive system” was “devised,” in which “attractive folders [were] furnished [to] dealers for distribution, setting forth arguments and inducements

\(^{184}\) McShane, _Down the Asphalt Path_, 135. The Model T was $850 in 1908 but $260 by 1921. John Bell Rae, _American Automotive Manufacturers: The First Forty Years_ (Philadelphia: Chilton Company Publishing, 1959), 108. Rae lists the price of a Ford touring car at less than $400 in 1916. Meanwhile, a new bicycle was less than $20.

\(^{185}\) “Directors’ Report Traces Growth of Big Idea” _Motorcycle and Bicycle Illustrated_, August 9, 1917, 21.

\(^{186}\) “Bicycle Dealers Organize” _MotorCycling and Bicycling_, December 27, 1915, 45.

\(^{187}\) “Remarkable Bicycle Booster Aids” _MotorCycling and Bicycling_, September 27, 1915. 48.
that will sell bicycles to boys and their parents.”

Within the system there was provided a plan “whereby the boy himself may earn his bicycle. Similar folders are prepared to win the girls to bicycle riding. Every class and condition is appealed to in the most effective way, through these folders, from the laboring man to the pampered children of the rich.”

While actual advertisements may suggest that the industry was primarily concerned with white men of a certain class, desperation was leading them to treat nearly anyone as a potential customer—as demonstrated by the move toward advertising to women and then to children.

New Departure went so far in the publicity campaign to publish their own advertisements giving notice to the rest of the industry about the campaign to sell more bikes than ever in 1916. Because it was a parts manufacturer, they were more concerned that bicycles be sold in general, with relatively little concern about which brand they were, since they could supply any bicycle manufacturer with brakes. There were a few other coaster brake manufacturers in the U.S. at the time, but the New Departure Company was a powerhouse in the industry with a strong voice in directing the MBC. The Goodyear Company, supplier of bicycle tires, was also instrumental in the One Million Bicycles campaign. One of their advertisements encouraged others in the industry that it could be done. It told other members, “You have simply let the automobile and motorcycle business scare you out. As a matter of fact, the automobile and motorcycle have taken only a small part of the former big demand for bicycles.”

In attempts to foster the cooperative spirit that industry leaders thought was the cure to

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188 Ibid.
189 Ibid.
191 The Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co. “1,000,000 Bicycles for 1916, It CAN Be Done” *MotorCycling and Bicycling*, November 15, 1915, 48.
low sales, the advertisement contended, “Bicycles are better made today. Prices are better. Roads are better. Tires are better. The business will thrive if we all get together and pull.”192 The ad concluded by encouraging dealers to write to Goodyear for a plan that would increase sales.

Goodyear circulated many ads encouraging merchants to link their business with Goodyear. One advertisement they printed implored dealers to get on board with the Goodyear marketing plan highlighting the fact that 136,082,830 Goodyear ads would be published “in the great magazines and weeklies of the nation.”193 Their promise to any merchant’s agreement to sell Goodyear tires was their “great trade-winning book for tire dealers.”194 The book included “ready-made advertisements, handle bar tags, package and envelope enclosures, advertising novelties, stationary, trade-winning letter service, mailing folders, booklets, moving picture slides, window displays, store signs, new schemes for winning trade, tire racks, and more.”195 These materials were, in fact, provided through the MBC, which Goodyear was helping support financially. Undoubtedly, the stationary and envelopes were for the dealer to mail to the prospects in his area directly, while the intention was that the dealer would display the slides in his store as proof that even stars of moving pictures enjoyed cycling. With the case of the moving picture slides, the bicycle industry expected to cash in on the notoriety of the actors and scenes in the slides.

Parts manufacturers such as Goodyear and New Departure, however, were noticeably more supportive of general campaigns to promote bicycles than bicycle

192 Ibid.
194 Ibid.
manufacturers. This could have been because the parts manufacturers had more money, therefore more power, and control over the bicycle industry as a whole. Parts manufacturers had an advantage in that they manufactured parts for several items. Tire manufacturers produced tires for motorcycles, bicycles, and automobiles. New Departure, which started out as a doorbell company, grew into a successful ball bearing manufacturer and became part of General Motors. Wholesalers who made large purchases from such parts manufactures and undercut prices were a source of frustration for bicycle manufacturers. Cleveland bicycles called attention to this system and attempted to use it to their advantage by questioning the authenticity and craftsmanship of wholesalers’ bicycles. Their catalog made sure to let the customer know that they made all their parts at their colossal plant in Westfield, Massachusetts. Their catalog said, “And herein lies the secret of the difference between the Cleveland and the common run of bicycles. All the component parts of Cleveland bicycles are designed and made in our own factory, each for its particular place, not bought outside and adapted to the desired purpose. In this manner is secured the well rounded, perfectly proportioned, evenly balanced bicycle, which cannot be secured in bicycles which, as is the case with many machines, are assembled from parts bought here and there and fitted as best they can be.”

Making such claims would obviously raise the ire of wholesalers and even

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196 Frank W. Schwinn to Mr. Bond, November 20, 1948, Inter-office notes to Advertising Department from Frank W. Schwinn, April 1943-December 1948, Bicycle Museum of American, New Bremen, Ohio. Schwinn told an executive if New Departure and the Diamond Chain company were eliminated the entire industry would be brought to a standstill. Bruce Epperson, a transportation planner and attorney who has written extensively about the bicycle industry, also argues that parts manufacturers had a majority share of control over the industry. Bruce Epperson, conversation with author, Paris, France, May 27, 2011. While Epperson agrees about the control of parts manufactures, he disagrees that there was any kind of cooperation among members of the industry. This is probably because his research ends around 1913, before the MBC was established. Bruce Epperson, e-mail message to author, October 23, 2009.

197 Cleveland Bicycle Catalog, Pope Manufacturing Co. 1909: 2. At the Bicycle Museum of America (New Bremen: Ohio). The catalog stressed the words made and assembled by printing them in bold.
parts manufacturers. This was precisely the sort of divisive attitude that trade associations like the MBC wanted to get beyond. One of their first campaigns would be to endorse more of a cooperative spirit in which there were no negative ads directed against one another and all dealers worked to create new business rather than stealing it from others. Prior to the MBC there was the Cycle Jobbers’ Association of America. The cycle jobbers (wholesalers) were concerned with increasing bike sales in whatever way possible. They worked to standardize parts, which would benefit the industry by making parts increasingly interchangeable. At the same time, however, it would result in generic bikes with one-size-fits-all type components that were not necessarily best-suited for application on all frames—precisely what the Cleveland catalog attacked. Another issue with the jobbers association was that it did not include bicycle manufacturers. As long as associations for jobbers and bicycle manufactures remained separate, it is no surprise that there was tension between the two groups. This is why the MBC would work so tirelessly to convince bicycle and parts manufacturers to invest time and resources into cooperative boosting.

Ultimately, the goal of selling one million bicycles in 1916, which New Departure, Goodyear, and other members of the bicycle industry truly thought achievable, was not. Since the MBC focused on a one-year goal, they were short-lived as an organization. In the opinion of the leaders of the committee, the failure to meet their goal was a result of not getting 100 percent cooperation from all the members of the industry, particularly when it came to funding the campaign. Goodyear ran articles publicizing the progress of the campaign saying, “There can be no doubt that bicycle and

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part manufactures are interested in the slogan and fulfillment.”199 The campaign report, however, reveals that many were more interested in the committee’s supply of free advertising materials than they were in making financial contributions.200 The report pointed out that most of the budget went toward providing dealers with window displays. In fact, the committee spent nearly 55 percent of 1916’s budget on creating and distributing window displays to dealers.201 The report included many letters sent to the director of the committee thanking him for the materials and giving the campaign credit for increased sales. Still, the campaign was a failure. The committee argued the campaign was actually effective but it was the donors who failed to do their part to achieve the goal. The total sales for 1916 was 526,076, just barely over half-way to the goal of one million.

After failing in 1916, industry leaders reinstated the goal of selling one million bicycles for 1917 with a projected campaign budget of $600,000.202 The campaign failed once again. Seeing that the goal was overly ambitious, the committee decided to change its name to the United Cycling Trade Directorate. This more accurately reflected their mission since their goals were scaled back after 1917 to simply increase sales, rather than trying to achieve a certain number. What the MBC and subsequently the Directorate hoped for was a return to the kind of sales that were occurring during the bicycle boom of the 1890s, but with more stability. While it saw the window displays as having “some value” they were, for the most part, considered a mistake and a primary reason for failure because they used over half of the budget. In a somewhat bitter and contemptuous tone,

199 “Goodyear Bicycle Boosting” MotorCycling and Bicycling, December 6, 1915, 39.
200 United Cycle Trade Directorate Report 1916-17, 1.
201 Ibid., 25. The dollar amount was $20,162.29 spent on window displays out of a total budget of $36,844.95.
202 Ibid., 30.
the Directorate rebuked merchants for failing to make monetary contributions to the campaign. The report stated, “It must not be overlooked that this shortage of funds lies with you [the merchant] and not with us [the Directorate], and that, had we received it, much more effective results would have been accomplished through the use of this material. We realize now that, while it is our proper function to train the dealer to trim his window and brighten up his store with all the material available, it is not our province to furnish that material.”

The report went on to complain that there was too much resistance and questioning of the campaign, even from those who contributed funds for the plan, and not enough “helpful spirit of co-operation which this work must have.”

This focus on cooperation was pivotal and so was the idea that individual businesses volunteer to contribute to the campaign, rather than being “conscripted.” In a comment that reflected the War’s impact on the psyche of American businessmen, the treasurer wrote, “In these days of volunteering and conscription it seems appropriate that I begin my report with whatever recognition we attach to those who volunteer. True, with man, it signifies no lack of patriotism or willingness to serve, but we do recognize a difference, so here’s to our volunteers, though they be but few.”

Many of those who “fought” the modus operandi of the campaign were in favor of spending the bulk of money and effort on a national advertising campaign. The Directorate, on the other hand, thought it a better idea to focus their attention on the retailers with the hopes that they would then give more and better quality attention to the potential customers in their specific locales.

The Directorate also published a series of booklets titled *The One Hundred Per Cent Bicycle Merchant*, which were issued with the goal of training bicycle merchants to

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203 Ibid., 1.
204 Ibid., 2.
205 Ibid., 19.
be better salesmen by reaching out to a diverse array of consumer groups. The Directorate was a co-operative organization representing various bodies associated with the bicycle industry. The main objective was to help the entire industry by sponsoring works of general publicity for the bicycle. In their advertisements, the slogan printed in all ads was, “Ride a Bicycle.” This campaign was “based on the fundamental points of the utility, convenience, economy and health obtained in the riding of a bicycle. The workman [was] advised to get rid of strap-hanging. The appeal to the business and family man [was] based on the exercise and health angles. The women [were] reminded of the convenience of a bicycle for running errands, etc.”

As part of their work, the Directorate undertook to cut advertisements and other bicycle related clippings out from papers. They compiled 27,080 inches of advertising, which had been placed in dealers’ local newspapers, totaling an $18,956 investment in advertising. Its research concluded that a majority of these advertisements were not of the type that could potentially create new business. “The vast majority undertook to sell wheels only to the man who was already in the market. Many featured the lowest priced wheels. Many were admittedly and self-evidently ‘fake’ advertisements quoting an outrageously low price in the hope of enticing the prospect into the store, when the dealer would attempt to sell him a higher priced wheel.” What the Directorate suggested in its findings and increasingly emphasized in directions to merchants was that they, as retailers, should busy themselves with cooperative tactics that could create new business, not steal customers away from their competitors. This signaled a sense that bicycle business was drying up and rather than try to create new business, something thought increasingly

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206 “Bicycle Drive Aims to Create New Users” *Printer’s Ink*, April 11, 1918, 82.
207 Ibid., 81.
208 Ibid.
difficult because of competition from the automobile, merchants were racing to the bottom.

The Directorate had learned from the mistake of price cutting in the 1890s.209 Bicycling World reminded industry members that “the bicycle trade does not want a boom” like the last one, which had left a sour taste “in the mouths of the survivors.”210 Clearly, they sought a profitable, yet stable, market. An article in MotorCycling and Bicycling proclaimed, “Lack of Co-operative Competition and the Cut Price Boll Weevil Are the Chief Evils. . . .”211 The author, T.J. Sullivan, who was a member of the Directorate, explained that “hole in the wall” bicycle shops with a dealer who “waits like a spider for a customer” and then pops out of the back of the shop to go get a part for the customer at another shop only to return and sell it at a profit of 50 cents were killing the business.212 When Sullivan spoke of the “cut-price boll weevil,” he was not talking about dealers undercutting one another. Rather, he suggested that dealers were using other dealers as their intermediaries—buying products from them and then selling it for profit. Sullivan used this example as a reason for the creation of a “hard-and-fast bicycle dealers’ association” so that they could remedy this problem. The shop that had the product in stock and the “hole-in-the-wall shop” both made a profit on one item during

209 Burr, “Markets As Producers and Consumers,” 240. Burr documents the steep drop in prices after the bicycle boom occurred. Pope Manufacturing lowered the price of their “Columbia” bicycles from $125, $150, and $160 for the racing model to a base price of $100 for all models in 1895. Prices in the Sears catalog fell from $55.95 to $48.90. After the bicycle boom, however, prices fell much more drastically. In 1899, Pope’s most expensive model was $75 and Sears offered bicycles for $13.95. The falling prices brought record sales but the bottom dropped out after a few years. Burr’s dissertation argues that over-production of bicycles in the U.S. led to a collapsing market and contrasts it with bicycle production in France, where the market remained stable.

210 Quoted in Herlihy, Bicycle, 377, 347.

211 T. J. Sullivan, “Atlanta Bicycle Business Prosperous” MotorCycling and Bicycling, February 19, 1917, 17. The choice of Boll Weevil was a contemporary comment on non-cooperating dealers’ destruction to the bicycle business comparing them to the boll weevil’s (beetle) destruction of agricultural profits.

212 Ibid.
separate transactions. The problem was, however, that when two merchants were making a profit on one product, they passed a higher cost on to the consumer. These exorbitantly priced tires and accessories could serve to contradict bicycle-marketing strategies, which suggested the bicycle was more economical than other forms of transportation.

The MBC and its successor, the Directorate, not only encouraged the industry to market utilitarian bicycles, they also saw benefit in promoting bicycle racing. The bicycle industry believed increased interest in racing would boost the sales of all styles of bicycles not just the competitive models. It encouraged dealers to take an active part in bicycle racing by promoting it or, if a town did not have races, to create them. For those new to race organization, the Directorate provided a bulletin to take them through the process, detailing how to advertise the races and how to procure prizes for the winners. For others who had already organized races, the bulletin would help them build races that were more successful because they were backed by the Directorate, which had the support of “all the manufacturers and jobbers of bicycles and bicycle parts.” The Directorate’s bulletin argued, “Everything that a dealer puts into a race, whether it be in the form of money or of energy expended in promoting the race, makes for an increased interest in the bicycle in his immediate neighborhood, which means more business and more profits for him at once.” The rationale was if the public could see bicycle races, they would also see how exciting and fast the bicycles could go, which would make them want to use bicycles themselves. The bulletin went on to explain that not only could the dealer be sure that those entering the race would visit his shop prior to the event to make

213 “Getting Ready for the Starter’s Pistol Shot” Bicycle News, III, no. 3 March 1917, 8. According to Bicycle News the article was taken “From the Racing Number of the ‘Million Bicycles’ Bulletin for February.
214 Ibid.
sure their bicycle was in sound mechanical order; they might even buy a new bicycle. In addition, the dealer could expect to see more sales to recreational riders. It claimed, “Everyone who sees the race gets the importance of the bicycle thrust upon him in a most impressive manner.”

It was expected that anyone young enough to potentially race would start to ask themselves if they could go as fast as the others and ultimately buy themselves a bicycle before the next race. Older men would find their interest in the bicycle renewed. After all, the bulletin posited, they were probably bicycle enthusiasts earlier in life anyway. Apparently, children who attended a bicycle race would be so caught up in bicycle fever that they would not give their father a rest until he bought them one of their own.

Since the bulletin was a product of the MBC and then used by the Directorate, there was a noted emphasis on cooperative promotion of the race. The bulletin suggested that any dealers interested should contact all other dealers in the immediate vicinity and promote the race together. It assured, “The more dealers there are back of each race the bigger the race will be, the better the publicity secured for it and the more business for each dealer as a result.”

For all the specifics regarding the rules and regulations of the races, the dealers and potential race organizers were to consult the National Cycling Association.

Another way in which the MBC and Directorate strove for co-operative bicycle boosting was through the creation of “bicycle day,” which grew into “bicycle week.” Beginning in 1916, bicycle day was created in an attempt to achieve unprecedented

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215 Ibid.
216 Ibid.
217 The National Cycling Association was the sanctioning body for bicycle racing at the time.
sales—“the biggest year the bicycle business ever saw.” ²¹⁸ It was suggested that dealers all over the country should give their store a makeover. Still, some in the industry believed that not all dealers were doing everything they should to promote their trade because they were ashamed of it. This was one of the side effects of the rising popularity and excitement surrounding automobiles. One bicycle booster said of these shameful dealers, “he dislikes it to be known that he is a bicycle man, whereas it is one of the most enlightened businesses of the age and you, Mr. Dealer, should be proud of the fact that you are associated with it.”²¹⁹ If dealers could feel embarrassed about selling bicycles then there was some degree of stigma associated with the bicycle. There was some hint that the bicycle was not as respected as it once was—when bicycle shops were popping up in every town and entrepreneurs everywhere flocked to the bicycle industry. In Denver, there were three times as many bicycle shops in 1898 as there were in 1895. In Providence, the number had more than doubled.²²⁰ The article continued, reassuring the dealer that he should not feel ashamed because, “The bicycle is as necessary to our health as plumbing is to our homes and it is therefore as legitimate to offer a bicycle for sale as hardware or eatables.”²²¹ This suggests that dealers may have felt more confident, or realistic, selling bicycles as a means of exercise and recreation rather than a utilitarian vehicle.

During this era of vigorous bicycle promotion, there were also numerous articles in the trade journals giving tips to store owners on how to merchandise their goods more

²¹⁸ W.F. Emerson, “Make Every Day in the Year Bicycle Day” Bicycle News, III, no. 3 March 1917, 9. This was part of the push to sell one million bicycles. W.F. Emerson was President of the Buffalo Metal Goods Company.
²¹⁹ Ibid.
²²⁰ Burr, Markets as Producers and Consumers, 408. Burr provides a graph of the number of bicycle shops per 10,000 population from 1895-1910 in Denver, Providence, Baltimore, and St. Louis. The trend in all cities is a steady rise from 1895 with a peak in either 1897 or 1898 an then a general decline.
effectively. It was also a comment on the state of dealers’ self-esteem. A key theme in these articles was to provide a clean and well-lit storefront. Another bicycle booster, Charles Gates, stressed, “If you have a pride in your business and add industry, neatness and politeness, success will have a hard job keeping out of your reach.”\(^{222}\) Storeowners were instructed to focus on marketing products in a bright and clean environment and to “Treat everyone who enter[ed] [their] place pleasantly, politely and with respect no matter how plainly or poorly they may be dressed.”\(^{223}\) Gates went on to suggest that the dealer always attempt to sell the most expensive product first and then work their way down from that point. He implored merchants to “not think because your customer looks poor that he wants the cheapest model, he may wish nothing but the best.”\(^{224}\) Lastly, he recommended that the dealer remain honest in all of their business. The logic was that tricking customers at the initial deal would only lead to a customer who never returned to the shop.

Aside from providing specific details on how storeowners could increase their sales, there were often pictures of “model” shops included in the pages of the trade journals so that dealers would know exactly what their shop should look like. One such picture shows the store owner in a bow tie and vest, standing behind one of his many glass display cases. Bicycles are in their own space across from him, tires, rims, and other accessories, that are too big for the glass cases hang from the wall.\(^{225}\) All of this provided for a shop that was cleaner in appearance and easier to move around in. The

\(^{222}\) Charles Fuller Gates, “Merchandising for the Bicycle Dealer” *MotorCycling and Bicycling*, April 23, 1917, 86.
\(^{223}\) Ibid.
\(^{224}\) Ibid.
\(^{225}\) “Picture of A.W. Nourse in his store at Lansing, Michigan” *MotorCycling and Bicycling*, September 13, 1915, 55. Nourse had reportedly sold about 100 bicycles that season and was doing so well that he was going to stop selling firearms and focus all of his attention on bicycles.
focus on cleanliness, honesty, and equal treatment of all customers regardless of their outward appearance was not only a manifestation of popular attitudes of the era, but it was also an expression of where members of the bicycle industry felt their trade had gone wrong in the past. This was another call from industry leaders for merchants to help diversify the bicycle business. Treating all customers equally, regardless of their outward appearance, reveals that there was a belief that merchants were ignoring potential customers who appeared poor. The emphasis on keeping stores clean was thought to make the shop more inviting to female customers who would be more likely to make a purchase if they were comfortable spending more time in the store. Since the women that were thought to be most likely to buy bicycles were those of the middle and upper classes, cleanliness was very important. The call for honesty suggests there were swindling dealers who were doing a disservice to their trade—in their greedy attempts to make a profit. Now, the opinion was that all could have a profit, as long as individuals within the industry worked together in the prescribed manner.

Bicycle parts manufacturers continued to provide free promotional materials to bicycle dealers. One ad from the Buffalo Metal Goods Company informed dealers, “Our Service department is at your disposal—get action now and prepare for a Bumper Bicycle Season.” 226 They added that their promotional materials were “full of convincing arguments to stimulate bicycle riding—the window transfers, pennants, pencil clips, price cards, display hubs, and wall hangers are just what you want.” 227 All of these goods were available at no charge to the dealer. The ad also included examples of several posters and promotional materials they could make available. Just like the New Departure Company,

227 Ibid.
the Buffalo Metal Goods company produced coaster brakes. They too, had much to gain from increased bicycle sales. However, neither New Departure, Buffalo Metal Goods nor any parts manufacturer for that matter, were creating ads that were entirely without mention of their own product or company. In most of the posters and pennants the Buffalo Company provides in their advertisement (below) the distinctive name of their product, the Atherton, is appears.

![Figure 3.2. Messages that sell bicycles.](image)

While dealers were encouraged to sell the most high-priced products to customers first, no matter how they were dressed, they were also instructed to pay attention to each customer, in attempts to sell them the bicycle best suited for his or her needs. Dealers were cautioned against trying to sell lightweight bicycles built for speed to a “working man.” The same article reminded dealers “probably 99 per cent of all the bicyclists of the
country, uses a heavier machine with ‘effort-absorbing’ roadster tires.”

This was in contrast to the racers who rode the lightest bikes possible and therefore stripped of all luxuries. The recreational, or “working man,” cyclist was thought of as not being physically trained. He would object “to being obliged to sweat and strain whenever he encounters any little rise of ground.” The article argued that if cycling was not easy and relaxing than the average individual would want nothing to do with it. Apparently, bicycle dealers knew this, but their problem was that bicycles were being shipped to them from factories with gear ratios that were too big. A large gear made it more difficult for an average person to ride because of the strength it required. The trade magazine told dealers to take action and start requesting that factories send bicycles with smaller gears and informed them, “The factories have all sizes of sprockets. It costs them no more to put on a 64 than a 96 gear.”

There was confusion over whether the average cycling consumer wanted a product that could go fast or one that was easy to use. Dealers also needed to consider the particular topography in their own local market. Those dealers in Chicago or Minneapolis might find that the average rider accepted a larger gear, while those in hillier cities might find their customers would more readily enjoy their bicycles if the hills were not so difficult to ascend. As bicycles and accessories became increasingly complicated over the years, this would cease to be such a problem because riders could eventually buy bicycles that had multiple gears, which they could switch with the simple adjustment of a lever.

228 “Selling No. 5 Shoes for No. 10 Feet” MotorCycling and Bicycling, September 17, 1917, 34.
229 Ibid.
230 Ibid. Bicycle gears are measured by number of teeth. The largest chain ring that comes standard on today’s bicycles is a 53. Professional riders would not even consider a 96 unless they were going to go for a record on a flat surface while being moto-paced, like Alf Letourneur’s record of 108 mph in 1941.
Gearing grew into an important issue by 1917. An article titled, “The Importance of Gearing to the Trade” argued that factories sent out bicycles with gears too large because the factory heads and designers, whom the author did not consider “practical riders,” had made an “error in judgment.” That error was due to factories receiving orders for bicycles that specifically requested larger gears. These came from younger riders and those who wanted to go fast but did not understand that the gears bicycle racers used were not suited for a novice rider. The article contended that when dealers sold bicycles that were geared too highly it could result in injury to riders and the bicycle boosting campaign that was well underway because riders would think of cycling as hard work. One method the dealer could employ to overcome this problem was to practice a little bit of a deceptive tactic. Believing the boys who wanted bigger gears mostly only paid attention to the front sprocket, the dealer could fix the bicycle with a larger front sprocket as well as a larger rear sprocket. This resulted in a more moderate gear ratio than that attained with a large front sprocket and smaller rear sprocket.

The real solution to the problem was for the public to be educated in bicycle gearing. Farwell laid out the history of gearing and explained how different gears affected the bicycle and the rider. He also gave reason to question the nature of bicycle racing’s impact on other forms of cycling and argued that the problem of over-gearing began at the ground floor, where boys who are fans of racing ask dealers for those bigger gears. In these instances, boys were undoubtedly going to races, keeping up with the stars of the sport and paying close attention to all the specifics of their favorite racers’ bicycles, which would seem to be good for the bicycle industry. At the same

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232 Ibid.
233 Ibid.
time, these young fans put too much faith in the idea that a lighter bike with bigger gears would make them faster, which resulted in buying bikes that were beyond their muscular development. This was the same argument made in the previous month’s issue. Both articles emphasized selling the customer the bicycle best-suited for his or her needs, but Farwell pointed out the misperceptions that resulted from watching experts and being told that much of what made them who they were was the bicycle they rode. Placing too much focus on the brand professionals rode and not the amount of training they did, made sense for bicycle manufacturers, from a publicity stand-point, but it also served to discourage newcomers who observed racers who made high speeds seem easy. Therefore, while industry leaders were telling dealers to organize and promote racing for better sales, some were also inadvertently suggesting that perhaps racing was a cause for dissatisfied customers.

This contradiction was not the only way in which industry leaders, and the trade journals they contributed to, led to dealers’ confusion. Another problem was that it was very common for one dealer to sell both motorcycles and bicycles during this era because bicycle manufacturers also produced motorcycles—such was the case with Harley Davidson, the Pope Manufacturing Company, Miami Cycle, Excelsior, and others. In the instances that the motorcycle and bicycle manufacturer were one in the same, there was the potential for a conflict of interest if the dealer was forced to promote one form of movement over the other. In promotion of the bicycle, much of the emphasis was on the ease of use, leisure, enjoyment, convenience, and savings. Yet motorcycles were often promoted in much the same way, especially regarding leisure, thrills, and convenience.

234 Selling No. 5 Shoes for No. 10 Feet” MotorCycling and Bicycling, September 17, 1917, 34.
Dealers were told that the “health-bringing qualities of a motorcycle, to say nothing of its economical pleasure features, center his interest in the machine immediately.”

Even one of the most popular trade journals devoted equal attention to both motorcycles and bicycles. Because motorcycles and bicycles were in competition with each other—each were promoted as a means for transportation and restorative of health—dealers that carried both would undoubtedly have to choose, on occasion, to extol the virtues of one over the other. If he promoted the motorcycle as fast, efficient, and easy, there was an implication that it was superior to the bicycle. One article suggested, “Go after the old men. Most of them used to ride a bike and can be persuaded to see the lightweight motor wheel or Cyclemotor, if afraid of the big boy. Make prospects of them, and if you don’t catch ‘em get their children for motorcycles and bikes and roller skates.” The illustration above the article pictured a sales clerk showing off his line to a well-dressed man and his son. A banner in the back suggested, “Buy the Boy a Bicycle.” Not only was the dealer potentially compromising himself by promoting the motorcycle over the bicycle to some customers and then the bicycle over the motorcycle to others, but he was also potentially damaging the image of the bicycle by suggesting the father buy a motorcycle for himself and a bicycle for his son. In this manner, the bicycle’s status was demoted from something for adults to something for children. While

236 Bicycles, however, consistently outsold motorcycles and did not appear to be as detrimental to sales as automobiles. Ranging from around $175-$200, there were 125,000 registered motorcycles in 1910, 175,000 in 1911 and the “high water mark” of domestic production during the era occurred in 1913 with 71,000 units sold. See: Harry V. Sucher, Inside American Motorcycling and the American Motorcycle Association, 1900-1990 (Laguna Niguel: Infosport, 1995), 20-30.
238 Ibid.
the question of motorcycles for men and bikes for boys is one issue, the compromise that dealers had to make was just as important.

Because the entire bicycle boosting campaign of the 1910s maintained that everyone was a potential customer, the industry’s marketing campaign became convoluted and the bicycle’s image became nebulous—when compared to the image it enjoyed in the 1880s and 1890s. Formerly a luxury item for elites, the industry tried to broaden the bicycle’s appeal as a cheap form of transportation for the working class, a practical and efficient means of carrying out business transactions, and a vehicle for women to not only complete errands but also as leisure. This was complicated further by the tendency of retailers who sold bicycles to offer motorcycles as well. Dealers could not be expected to promote both bicycles and motorcycles for the very same reasons without being a little more zealous in their promotion of one over the other. Trade journals and bicycle advertisements too were trying to make such broad based appeals that they were often marketing to one group at the expense of another. These attempts to broaden appeal, which ran in so many directions, could do little to clearly state or redefine what the bicycle was to represent. By trying to do too much, the bicycle industry achieved very little.

The U.S. and the world economies during World War I had a great impact on the bicycle industry. The onset of the war resulted in relaxed regulations on American exports. This, coupled with the rising scarcity of consumer goods in Europe, allowed American-made bicycles to flourish overseas. More importantly, the growing economy at home, beginning in 1915, provided opportunities for men and even women to work for steadily increasing wages. The increased sales of bicycles in 1914 breathed fresh life into
the industry as it began working harder than ever on making systematic attempts to increase and diversify its consumer base. With the establishment of the MBC and then the Directorate, the industry was coming together as never before. Both trained, or at least informed, small independent retailers how to sell more bicycles and what they needed to do to entice customers. They were not necessarily achieving their full potential nor did they re-create the bicycle boom of the 1890s, but to a degree, they were surviving. At the war’s end, as normalcy began to settle back over the U.S., as the factories began to slow, foreign-made bicycles began to reappear prominently on sales floors. 239 The working class soon found that they too could afford automobiles. Now that society women and others were not expected to sacrifice, or be as frugal as they were during the war, who would the industry turn to for stability? How were they to maintain sales when many of their marketing tactics were no longer relevant at the end of the war? The industry was left to think about which part of their customer base was still intact and relatively unchanged after the war.

The impact of World War I, the dawning of the automobile age, and changing conceptions of mobility all held great sway over the course of bicycle marketing. The industry tried to broaden the appeal of the bicycle by marketing it as a utilitarian vehicle for American workers but it simultaneously held out hope that cycling would become a popular form of recreation for elites and middle-class men once again. There was more confidence that elite women could be convinced to take up cycling than elite men, however. Elite men were preoccupied with automobiles but the class distinction conferred by driving would lessen as cars became increasingly affordable over the course

239 They reappeared in such volumes that by 1921, T.J. Sullivan would ask, “Should Germans or Americans Make Our Bicycles” MotorCycling and Bicycling, February 2, 1921, 8.
of the 1910s. Cars not only competed directly against bicycles in the market, they also widened the concept of mobility and gave impetus to the need to (re)define all other forms of movement. The car exacerbated the sense of desperation among members of the bicycle industry—as they saw sales unable to recover from the bust at the turn of the century—and led to an identity crisis. The bicycle industry was so desperate to broaden its consumer base beyond middle-class men that it tried to make cycling for everyone and therefore, no one in particular.

As the novelty of the bicycle wore off, so did the ideas that it necessitated great strength and agility to maneuver. With advancements in metallurgy and frame building technologies, smaller bicycles with smaller gears were finding their way into the homes and hearts of American children. The full-scale onslaught of the child market had not yet occurred but by 1915 it was clear that the industry was considering American children as potential customers, as it attempted to corner every part of the market. Curiously, even though the industry was now attentive to women, children, and individuals of all classes, there was still no discussion of the potential of marketing to non-whites. First, the toy of elite men and then a means of liberation for women and a utilitarian device for all classes, the bicycle ultimately became inextricably linked to childhood in the 1920s-1950s. The child was the bicycle’s last hope. It was this sense of desperation and loss of a clear identity that would lead the industry to focus marketing on children in the following decades.

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CHAPTER FOUR: “A YOUNGER DEMOGRAPHIC, 1915-1928”

In its book, *Fifty Years of Schwinn Built Bicycles*, Arnold, Schwinn & Company went into very little detail about the development of the children’s bicycle market. Instead, it treated the occurrence as a natural result of forces beyond the industry’s control. Recounting the bicycle industry’s state at beginning of the twentieth century Schwinn wrote, “The heydey of the bicycle was over, and cheaper bicycles, if there were to be any at all; were the order of the day. Lower prices made the bicycle possible for older children, and gradually a new market for bicycles developed in America—a children’s market.”¹ This “children’s market” was not created in a vacuum; bicycle manufacturers and merchants cultivated and developed the market to the extent of their abilities. This development would become extremely important for the bicycle. Their efforts were logical considering the increasing competition from cars, as well as the fact that the industry wanted to broaden its market. It was a move, however, that would have significant effects on bicycle consumption in the United States for many years to come.

The bicycle industry’s emphasis on marketing bicycles to children, which had begun as early as 1915, was fully underway by 1919, as the industry conglomerate Cycle Trades of America (CTA) made the children’s market a fundamental component of their bicycle boosting campaign. The increasing attention to children in their marketing campaign was evident in magazines such as *American Boy* and *Boy’s Life*.² It was also

² Lisa Jacobson, *Raising Consumers: Children and the American Mass Market in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 27. Jacobson writes that it was during the mid 1910s that *American Boy* began to “swell with ads for bicycles, erector sets, rifles, and breakfast cereals.” A sampling of *Boys’ Life* also shows this to be true. In the April issue from 1911-1920 the number of bicycle advertisements are as follows: 1911=0, 1912=2, 1913=5, 1914=6, 1915=7, 1916=11, 1917=21,
apparent in the decision to build the Christmas campaign, moving Bicycle Week to coincide with National Boys’ Week, ties between the Boy Scout movement and the bicycle, and in advertisements that celebrated the bicycle as a means of creating strong, healthy, and independent children.

The rise in American consumerism is most often associated with growing affluence after World War II but that period represents the peak of developments that have their roots in the 1880s and 1890s. Richard Fox and T.J. Lears have argued that the genesis of American consumerism can be located within the preoccupations of white elite adults, it would only be a matter of years before the values of consumerism were imparted to American children. Steven Mintz shows how advertisements soon marketed toys directly too children but this development occurred even earlier than he suggests. Whereas Mintz locates it in the late 1920s, Lisa Jacobson provides evidence that it had began as early as 1911. Jacobson argues that by the early 1910s children’s magazines such as American Boy “were trumpeting the untapped potential of the boy market and the dynamic salesmanship of the boy consumer in the advertising press. Children’s magazine publishers continued to press their case during the interwar years, when the child consumer became the focus of numerous articles in advertising trade press and the target of advertising campaigns for everything from breakfast cereal and toys to big ticket items such as radios and automobiles.” This chapter confirms that advertising’s attempts to appeal directly to children were replete among marketing strategies of the bicycle industry before the United States entered World War I.

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1918=21, 1919=16, 1920=16. By 1917, the advertisements were larger and some were in color occupying full pages or even the back cover.


5 Jacobson, Raising Consumers, 16-17.
Jacobson admits the 1920s were a “major turning point in the field” as even the advertising trade itself, not just children’s magazines “s[al]ing the praises of the child consumer.”6 The bicycle industry followed a similar path, at first it seemed to experiment with children’s advertisements in the first half of the 1910s. By the early 1920s, however, the bicycle industry was poised to go “all in” marketing to juvenile consumers. Jacobson argues that general marketing to boys marked a “privileging of boy culture” in a manner that offered psychic rewards to advertisers. Since advertising was primarily a male profession, “the boy consumer was an ideal spokesman for the progressive virtues of consumption and a “promoter of the new and improved” which reflected “advertisers’ own self-image as the engineers of the nation’s rising standard of living.”7 She also argues that the more overt appeals to boys’ consumer appetites demonstrated “advertisers’ new assessment of boy culture.”8 This chapter complicates her argument by contending that, at least for bicycle marketing, boys were also targeted because they were convenient. Not only were boys thought to be enterprising consumers who actively influenced their peers, thereby increasing sales, they also provided an opportunity for broadening appeals without reimaging the product. The ideals promoted in bicycle marketing did not change but the demographic it targeted did.

Over time, the training of Americans to be good consumers and therefore good citizens, occurred earlier in life. Building on the work of Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm, consumer historian Charles McGovern demonstrates how ideas of nationalism, which are founded on culture, have been significantly influenced by

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6 Ibid., 28.
7 Ibid., 105.
8 Ibid., 123.
consumption. In fact, McGovern argues advertisers and consumer scientists “promoted consumption as citizenship and trained consumers to be citizens. In this sense, consumption became a core element of the American nation-state.” Bicycle advertisements reveal that goods were promoted to children in much the same way. In the process, certain ideals of masculinity were moved ahead in the life cycle becoming traits that should be developed during childhood.

While the industry began to reconstitute the bicycle as a necessary part of the boyhood experience, it was inadvertently transforming the bicycle into a child’s toy. If the bicycle was encouraged as a part of childhood and the move to adulthood required a throwing-off of those vestiges of childhood, then adults would certainly feel pressure to abandon the bicycle for something more grown-up, more exciting, and naturally, more expensive. By the 1920s, as the bicycle industry worked to expand its consumer base to include children, it faced two distinct problems: how to appeal to a group that had no real income and how to convince parents to buy bicycles for that group—their children. Well after the invention of the safety bicycle, the thought of creating advertisements directed specifically at children was a foreign concept for retailers, since children did not have their own income and therefore would not be the ones to make the actual purchase. It was also true that many of the popular forms of advertising focused on describing the product, in contrast to more modern forms, which targeted the consumer. Early ads for children’s bicycles focused either specifically on the product or, in some instances, on

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children’s parents. Manufacturers generally relegated such appeals to the pages of catalogs since there were no active advertising campaigns for the children’s market. By the mid 1910s, however, this was clearly changing. As the bicycle industry encouraged merchants to “get after the boy” it also began creating advertisements with children in mind.\(^\text{12}\) It did not decide to focus on younger consumers strictly out of desperation, although it was certainly doing anything it could to attract new customers. There were also cultural changes underway, changes that emphasized children’s independence as well as their preparedness for adulthood. Part of this was in reaction to the perceived requirements for good citizens—an increasing emphasis on patriotic manhood and womanhood—during World War I.\(^\text{13}\)

Bicycle marketing was not only younger in its appeals; there was also a noticeable emphasis on boys rather than girls. As early as 1917, leaders in the bicycle industry, such as W.P. Farrell, implored dealers and manufacturers to cater their stock to boys. He wrote, “play to the kid all the time. If you don’t you lose your best bet. The boy is the natural prospective customer for a bicycle. It comes along in his process of evolution as logically as the velocipede and roller skates. The bicycle is the next step. The bicycle is as much the expectation of every boy as an automobile is the expectation of every business man.”\(^\text{14}\) Farrell’s suggestions give explicit insights into the formulation of a hierarchy of masculinity, consumption, and mobility. He did not create this hierarchy but

\(^\text{12}\) T.J. Sullivan, “‘Get After the Boy’ Says Farrell” *MotorCycling and Bicycling* September 3, 1917, 35.
\(^\text{14}\) T.J. Sullivan, “‘Get After the Boy’ Says Farrell” *MotorCycling and Bicycling* September 3, 1917, 35. Children’s velocipedes are commonly referred to as tricycles today.
it was recently overhauled, given the fact that automobile sales were burgeoning. Farrell was simply expressing what industry trends were increasingly revealing, that the bicycle would belong to boys, any other groups who purchased bicycles were something of a windfall.

This turn to the juvenile marketing at the neglect of adults suggests that the bicycle industry was ceding way to the car. The fact that the bicycle industry seemed so ready to relinquish its share of the adult market was all the better for the automotive industry. As the bicycle industry began to devote more time and energy into marketing the bicycle to children, it helped to redefine and firmly entrench the bicycle as a lesser form of movement. In turn, American culture would come to associate manhood with the consumption of the automobile. This uncovers more about the class ideals associated with consumer goods; those that were more expensive confirmed a higher status, but notions of class are also intrinsically linked to notions of gender. Furthermore, the manner in which Americans consumed the automobile to achieve these ideals also suggests something about mobility. Tim Cresswell’s study of mobility in the U.S. argues, “The early history of the automobile was thoroughly entwined with the construction and defense of particular visions of masculinity. Mechanical prowess, the control of space, ideas of sexual conquest, and the feeling of power that comes from being in control of one’s own destiny were all wrapped up in the automobile. This was reflected in ownership figures. In 1915, for instance, only 9.1 percent of car owners in the state of Maryland were women.”

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15 In 1909 there were just over 300,000 cars registered in the U.S., by 1918 that number surpassed 5.5 million. See table 4.1.
16 Tim Cresswell, On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World (New York: Routledge, 2006), 196-197. Cotten Seiler argues that the car was somewhat effete at first but “as automobility ‘trickled down’ to
increasingly faster and able to go further distances was more symbolic of masculinity than an object that required greater physical exertion to operate confirms that manhood was, in part, a function of one’s freedom and ability to move.

Bicycle and Automobile Sales 1914-1923

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>U.S. Market apparent consumption of bicycles</th>
<th>Cars Registered</th>
<th>Increased registration over previous year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>398,899</td>
<td>1,664,000</td>
<td>474,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>……..</td>
<td>2,332,000</td>
<td>668,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>526,076</td>
<td>3,368,000</td>
<td>1,036,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>606,918</td>
<td>4,727,000</td>
<td>1,359,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>567,207</td>
<td>5,555,000</td>
<td>828,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>479,163</td>
<td>6,679,000</td>
<td>1,124,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>750,000</td>
<td>8,132,000</td>
<td>1,453,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>149,192</td>
<td>9,212,000</td>
<td>1,080,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>150,000</td>
<td>10,704,000</td>
<td>1,492,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>525,000</td>
<td>13,253,000</td>
<td>2,549,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1

Many of the appeals initially made to children surfaced during the Christmas season. Trade magazines also attempted to get dealers motivated to sell to children by running ads with joyous scenes, one of which included a boy standing by a Christmas tree, jubilant over his new bicycle while the parents watched in the background, careful not to disturb the moment.17

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The “Dealers Department” section of *MotorCycling and Bicycling* magazine told dealers that when soliciting business during the Christmas season to not only get the children interested, but to engage their parents as well. Many of the suggestions sounded like ploys whereby the merchant and the child would conspire to convince their parents to buy a bicycle. “Pick out the one you like best and we’ll see help you get father to buy it.”

Some ads simply encouraged parents to buy bicycles for their children, while others targeted the children directly. Advertisements even suggested that children save money to repay parents by using their new bicycles to earn revenue. They were not only encouraged to do chores or get jobs and become active consumers, but to take advantage of credit opportunities. Advertisements told parents that the purchase of a bicycle for their child was an investment. One ad pictured a young boy smiling and holding up his bicycle in front of a Christmas tree. The copy explained, “He’s happy because he has what he wanted most.” It continued, “ANY boy or girl can make his or her bicycle pay for itself by saving car fares, doing errands, etc. And best of all, this kind of work is

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fun.” Of course, the idea of children working for wages to help support the family predates 1915 but this was not a suggestion that parents send their child to work. Rather, it partially focused on the money parents could save and attempted to implant in children the idea that they could use bicycles to earn money. This manner of advertising bicycles was not just the marketing ploy of one company; it was part of the cooperative boosting plan initiated in 1915 by the New Departure Manufacturing Company, Goodyear, the Million Bicycles Committee, and then the United Cycles Trade Directorate—all of which held sway over the direction and nature of national advertising campaigns.

Manufacturers, like the Davis Sewing Machine Company of Dayton, Ohio, began their Christmas advertisements by October, running ads in *The American Boy, Boy’s Life, Youth’s Companion, Popular Mechanics, and Popular Science Monthly.* An advertisement in the December 1917 issue of *Popular Mechanics* for Indian bicycles told parents that a bicycle was the “best solution for the youngsters’ Christmas gift problem.” The fact that this campaign was directed at young males is demonstrated by the magazines companies chose to run advertisements in and more explicitly in statements about their intentions. The Davis Sewing Machine Company wanted Christmas season ads to “help Dayton dealers lengthen the bicycle buying season by calling the boys’ attention to the fact that the fall is a great riding season.” Often it was the art that revealed who was targeted. An advertisement for the United States Tires told readers that when asking for a bicycle for Christmas to insist that parents buy a bike

20 Both the editor and publisher of *MotorCycling and Bicycling* were members of these organizations.
21 “Extensive Bicycle Advertising Campaign” *MotorCycling and Bicycling* October 1, 1919, 51. The Davis Sewing Machine Company also manufactured bicycles.
23 Extensive Bicycle Advertising Campaign” *MotorCycling and Bicycling* October 1, 1919, 51.
equipped with U.S. bike tires. The art showed a boy on his bike waving to his parents on
the porch while his sister stood nearby holding a doll.\textsuperscript{24} The advertising manager for the
Davis Company, S.H. Ankeney, believed more work of a similar nature needed to be
done. He told members of the bicycle industry, “the reason more bicycles are not given
for Christmas presents is that the attention of parents is not directed to the bicycle as a
logical Christmas present for the boy.”\textsuperscript{25} This was precisely why advertisements directed
at the juvenile market were run in adult, as well as children’s, magazines.

The decision to market bicycles to children during the Christmas season was
logical because it was the time of year for children to get relatively expensive gifts.
MotorCycling and Bicycling proclaimed, “Every bicycle dealer should start a campaign
to sell bicycles for Christmas at once. It is the universal testimony of the leading dealer
in the country that Christmas is the best season between September and April to dispose
of left-over bicycles.”\textsuperscript{26} In attracting the business of children during the Christmas
season, industry leaders suggested that local merchants call on the help of the boys and
girls who already had bicycles. They advised merchants to offer incentives to young
customers who might come in for repair work—telling them that if they were to give the
merchant a list of friends, neighbors, and classmates who might be prospective customers
they would give them a bell or some other small accessory as a reward.\textsuperscript{27}

Once the merchant had the names and addresses of these prospects, they mailed a
circular. An example letter was provided for merchants to use as a template. One
proclaimed, “There’s heaps of fun in a bicycle. You have envied your playmates who

\textsuperscript{24} United States Tires, \textit{Popular Mechanics} December 1917, 116.
\textsuperscript{25} Extensive Bicycle Advertising Campaign” \textit{MotorCycling and Bicycling} October 1, 1919, 51.
\textsuperscript{26} “The Christmas Bicycle Sales Campaign” \textit{MotorCycling and Bicycling} October 29, 1917, 22.
\textsuperscript{27} “Christmas Business for Cycle Dealers” \textit{MotorCycling and Bicycling} December 6, 1915, 16.
have them. Perhaps you have even learned to ride on a borrowed machine. It would be nice to have one of your own. Now is the time to get it. Just mention to father that you wish that Santa Claus would bring you one of those dandy bicycles you saw in the window of Jones Cyclery.”\textsuperscript{28} The circular implied that if they did not have a bicycle they were essentially being robbed of the childhood experience. The Directorate gave merchants assurance that it would do everything possible to help them move inventory during the Christmas season.

The bicycle industry’s increasing focus on children was not only apparent in advertising but also among retailers. Merchants were encouraged to adopt enterprising methods to get children into their store. Trade magazines told shop owners, that the ability to plant a desire for a new bicycle in “the hearts of boys and girls” was a “psychological matter.”\textsuperscript{29} They were provided with examples of how other dealers had created plans that aroused such a desire. Specifically, the plan of one dealer in Ohio who had made an agreement with the local daily newspaper was included “whereby the newspaper offers a prize of a high-class bicycle for boys or girls or both who solicit subscriptions for the journal.”\textsuperscript{30} The newspaper publicized the competition while making sure to praise the local bike shop sponsor for its excellence and generosity. This part of the plan was designed to instill a sense of customer loyalty in the local community. Of course, only one or two—if a boy and girl won—could actually claim the bicycle, but the shop owner knew that even those who did not win would want a bicycle more than ever. In the case of the dealer in Ohio, the author informed others that “the boys of the community had been enthused to the highest pitch of hope and expectation and all had

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 17.
\textsuperscript{29} Tee Bee, “Creating Desire for Bikes in the Young” \textit{MotorCycling and Bicycling} December 29, 1917, 33.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
been working hard for subscriptions to the newspaper with the bicycle as an objective."\textsuperscript{31}

This technique would continue to be used over the years, and would take the form of essay contests and other such competitions where children could spend a few weeks working for, and daydreaming about, winning the grand prize of a brand new bicycle.\textsuperscript{32}

Bicycle boosters believed that the combination of seeing their children work to win a bicycle and the disappointment experienced if they did not win, would compel any parent to buy a bicycle for his or her child. Not only would they want to cheer that child up after losing the competition, they would also want to use the moment to teach them that hard work really did have a reward. At the root of such marketing tactics was a belief that children were an overwhelming force in the consumer choices their parents made.

Marketing strategists told manufacturers and retailers if they sold to the boy they would have at their command a “progressive and loyal consumer, eager and able to influence family spending.”\textsuperscript{33}

Of course, the ultimate purpose of trade magazines was to increase sales and to a large extent, its methods reveal the thoughts and opinions of bicycle industry leaders. There were, however, numerous articles such as the one above that unveiled the extent to which merchants followed industry leaders’ prescriptions. They also show merchants own ideas on how to boost sales. One such revelation came from the story of a dealer in Toledo, Ohio, who believed the best way to increase sales was to start a club for white patrons of all ages. His club welcomed “All white bicycle riders from the youngest to the

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{32} Ira A. Alexander, “How One Dealer Got Cycle Prospects” \textit{MotorCycling and Bicycling} December 29, 1917, 17.
\textsuperscript{33} Jacobson, \textit{Raising Consumers}, 93.
oldest . . . without fear of initiation or any other kind of dues.”

His desire to exclude non-whites is unsurprising since bicycle races and clubs were segregated at that time. There was also a belief that the mere sight of African-Americans participating in certain recreations would “disgus[t] white prospects.”

The purpose of the club was to expand the age range of groups involved in cycling by teaching new riders the skills to ride their bicycles properly and “take care of themselves.”

The dealer himself spoke of how he often went for rides with club members and was interested in promoting a road race, if he could get some other dealers to join him. The result was sales that were better than ever.

What is surprising about this article is that other than starting a club for all ages, the merchant does not mention advertising or marketing to children. However, the title of the article boldly proclaims, “Selling Cycles by Interesting Boys” and the editor added that the moral of the story was that “No bicycle dealer can make the worth-while success unless he succeeds in interesting boys and girls. But you can’t interest them by sticking to your repair bench.”

The conclusion of making sales by getting out and riding with patrons, or starting a club for them—not by relying on repairs—is a logical one to draw, but the use of this story as evidence that dealers must target boys was more of a leap.

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34 “Selling Cycles by Interesting the Boys” MotorCycling and Bicycling September 24, 1917, 29. Dues were a convenient way for clubs to exclude undesirable classes.
35 “Twixt Nigger and the Devil” Motorcycling October 26, 1914, 8.
36 “Selling Cycles by Interesting the Boys” MotorCycling and Bicycling September 24, 1917, 29. It is interesting that he even specified that the club was for white riders. It suggests that there were black cyclists in Toledo. He also made it known that he did not extend credit, so the article revealed how concepts of race and class intertwined, at least for this dealer.
37 Ibid.
38 “Selling Cycles by Interesting the Boys” MotorCycling and Bicycling September 24, 1917, 29.
This spin that the editor, T.J. Sullivan, tried to put on the story gives insight into the specific agenda of this trade magazine and, by extension, leaders of the industry.¹³⁹

Manufacturers were also extremely proactive in selling bicycles. In fact, they often appeared to make more of an investment than retailers—due to their willingness to invest time and money into efforts to help dealers. Such was the case with the Buffalo Metal Goods Company’s initiative to create lists of prospective buyers. The president of the company, W.F. Emerson, explained, “First off, we write to boys asking them to send in the names of dealers in their towns. To the boys who send in dealers’ names we give a souvenir. Then we get to work on the dealer by sending him three letters. If the dealer doesn’t answer the third letter we mark him down as dead and cut him off the list.”¹⁴⁰ For the boys who responded, the company gave away more than enough pencil holders or similar items, undoubtedly with the company’s name embossed and the expectation that boys would share them with their friends. It also asked boys and, in turn, dealers, to send lists of boys who were prospective buyers. The company would then personally send letters to those on the list. Emerson bragged that through this method, Buffalo Metal Goods Company had “hit up our sales to 100,000 Atherton coaster brakes this year, and our business this year has increased 60 per cent over last year.”¹⁴¹ This was similar to the strategy bicycle dealers themselves would adopt in the future. An article titled "Going After the Bicycle Business," suggested, "Every boy in your community is a prospect for a bicycle and if the dealer can instill in the boy a desire strong enough for a bicycle he will

³⁹ “Work Ahead for Motorcyclists!” MotorCycling Illustrated January 18, 1917, 7. T.J. Sullivan was a member of the Motorcycle and Allied Trades association, which aligned itself with the Directorate, and then the CTA a larger umbrella organizations intent on selling bicycles.
sell a large proportion of the boys in his community.”42 The article instructed store owners in how to go after the juvenile market by giving examples of successful tactics that had been used by some of the more enterprising salesmen. It also revealed the bicycle industry’s notions about boys ambitions for consumer goods and their ability to persuade not only their parents but also their peers. One method of access to these ideal consumers used eventually was to "secure a complete list of boys who are good live prospects" by mailing letters to school teachers and offering them a small amount of money for each boy they could provide contact and other miscellaneous information for. One such piece of information asked for was whether the boy had any means of earning their own spending money.43

As well as demonstrating emerging beliefs about the power of boy consumers, bicycle marketing also highlighted notions of American nationalism. Much like the Boy Scout movement and physical culture in general, the bicycle could instill in boys an appreciation for the beauty of their country while training their muscles and bodies to be ready for militaristic duties. Numerous advertisements showed boys developing themselves and coming of age in the countryside. Along with their bikes, they played in creeks and ponds. One advertisement for Harley Davidson bicycles pictured a boy holding a frog (fig., 4.2). The copy claimed bicycles were great for the boy with “pent-up eagerness to get out into the country.”44 A similar ad for Columbia bicycles pictured a

44 Harley Davidson Motor Company, *Boys’ Life* April, 1918, 55.
boy fishing (fig., 4.3). It told boys that spring was on the way and road conditions would be improving enough for them to visit their favorite patch of woods, lakes, and brooks.45

Boys were also depicted using bicycles to perform tenets of American citizenship in advertisements that were overtly nationalistic. New Departure ran advertisements picturing a Boy Scout trying to sell something to a man in a suit in the foreground (fig., 4.4). Images of tanks and explosions appeared overhead and in the background. The copy said, “Scouts of the U.S.A.—speeding from place to place on their trusty bikes—boosting the Red Cross, W.S.S., Liberty Loans—earning money to buy Thrift Stamps—

45 Westfield Manufacturing Company, Boys’ Life April, 1917, 39.
are all helping put the ‘punch’ into America’s soldiers in France." Here, boys were told they could make a direct contribution to the war effort. A separate advertisement by New Departure invoked a popular nationalistic symbol and told boys, “Ride a Bike for Uncle Sam.” In his study of American consumption and citizenship, Charles McGovern refers to such appeals as a part of “material nationalism.” He shows that Uncle Sam was used in advertisements for a wide variety of consumer goods as well as other symbols of America such as the Founders, Christopher Columbus, the Washington Monument, the Statue of Liberty, and the American eagle. *Printers’ Ink* claimed that the use of national symbols, like Uncle Sam, were of double value. They provided a “decidedly likeable, lovable personality, plus the dignity of country-wide recognition. He [Uncle Sam] is a symbol of the whole United States; he is everybody rolled into one . . . . He is America.” McGovern argues, “Uncle Sam’s presence implied that the whole country used the product, and imaginative advertisers melded his image with that of the nation.” In essence, New Departure’s advertisement that told boys to ride their bicycle for Uncle Sam was implying that they should ride bicycles for the good of their nation. Other advertisements used the imagery of war and bicycles together. The U.S. Rubber Company commissioned advertisements with art that included soldiers in the background (fig., 4.5). The copy boldly proclaimed the boy of 1918 was more useful than the boy of 1914 because his work was “worth so much more to the country. He helps take the place of older chaps who have gone to war.” Goodrich bicycle tires offered a booklet that

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46 New Departure Manufacturing Company, “The Boys behind the Army” *Boys’ Life* April, 1918, 49.
boys could request titled “The Boy’s Part in the Great War.” It offered “Lots of pictures! Tells all about the war? How you can help your country win! How to use your bicycle in many new ways! How to make money to buy Thrift Stamps!”\(^\text{51}\)

Outside of advertisements, there were also articles that tied notions of boys, bikes, and nation together. An article titled “How the Boy Scouts Help in War” was illustrated with a photo of two boys tacking a poster to a pole while a bicycle leaned nearby. The caption said, “They sometimes help the recruiting officers.”\(^\text{52}\) In fact, the Boy Scouts of America were trained for potential duties in the war in a more explicit and direct manner

\(^{52}\) “How the Boy Scouts Help in the War” Boy’s Life June, 1917, 7.
than they ever had been before. Here too, these boys would need a bicycle to do their part. A July 1917 article entitled “Getting After the Boy Scout Business” highlighted some of the “many patriotic services” Boy Scouts were performing. Services such as, “carrying messages, collecting metal material, delivering mail, and in hundreds of devious ways they have taken the place of the men who were needed at the front.”

Under the heading “Bicycles Aid Boy Scout Work” the article argued that “Were it not that these boys are sturdy cyclists, they would not be nearly so valuable to their country.” Together, the advertisements and articles helped disseminate a juvenile version of masculinity in which boys exuded virtues of patriotism even without the ability to join American men at the war’s front. More importantly, for the bicycle industry, bicycles were the ideal commodity for boys to buy because they aided the efforts of boys who were anxious to get involved. The activities prescribed, however, were more similar to those suggested for wives and mothers, who were asked to do their part from the home front rather than the front lines.

Even while the expectation for boys was to play a supportive role, the imagery used suggested an eventual transition into actual physical service on the front lines. For instance, in the U.S. Rubber Company advertisement (fig., 4.5) the boy on his bike looks toward soldiers marching to war and he is likened to a soldier on a motorcycle riding alongside the soldiers.

During World War I, there was decidedly more attention given to the maintenance of the population’s physical strength and mental determination. Training boys would help assure that that they grew to be stronger, abler bodied, men. Articles gave instructions to,

53 “Getting After the Boy Scout Business” MotorCycling and Bicycling July 9, 1917, 29.
54 Ibid.
"Arrange to have the boys with bicycles meet one day a week at [your] store and then have a trip arranged for them and take them on a scout through the country, stopping at dinner time and cooking their dinner in the open." Merchants were told that the war offered a great opportunity for sales suggesting, “He [the boy] likes to feel that while he is not old enough to carry a gun and go to the front, he can do the next best thing and work for his country in such a way that his work will count. It is certain that many bicycles will be sold to Boy Scouts for this very reason.” Dealers were also told that they would “have little difficulty in disposing of their bicycle stocks if they go after the Bicycle Boy Scout business properly.” They could do this by setting up window displays with a wax dummy dressed as a Scout and also by getting the name of the chief Boy scout in their community, a name which they should have on their prospect list anyway.

Even though the industry was focusing on a younger demographic, there was still an underlying assumption that boys would enjoy their bikes more if they were used in a manner that simulated manhood. The bicycle was thereby capable of indoctrinating boys to manhood early on—by getting them back to their rustic heritage out in nature, cooking and eating by a campfire and by training them in business, or by aiding their contributions to the war effort. When it came to paying for the bicycles, dealers could “suggest a campaign among parents of the Boy Scouts and business men to raise a fund to mount Boy Scouts on bicycles.” In other articles, merchants were also informed that some Boy Scout groups, such as those in Rochester, N.Y., were preparing for messenger

56 "How the Boy Scouts Help in the War" Boy’s Life June, 1917, 7.
57 "Getting After the Boy Scout Business" MotorCycling and Bicycling July 9, 1917, 29.
58 Ibid., 30.
59 "Getting After the Boy Scout Business" MotorCycling and Bicycling July 9, 1917, 30.
duties in the war effort by practicing message relays. Bicycle boosters made sure that merchants knew to concentrate on the boy and to take advantage of patriotic sentiments during the war effort, reflected by the growing Boy Scout movement. Merchants were told, “several bicycle troops are now being formed in the various divisions in anticipation of doing war-time duty.” 

The B.F. Goodrich Company made dealers aware that the War was, in fact, beneficial for their sales. In a one-page advertisement the company proclaimed, “There’s no ‘slacking up’ among bicycle riders. More than ever before, war has demonstrated the bicycle’s practical utility. School boys and Scouts will use more wheels for leisure-hour work.”

Fear that the war was going to actually hinder bicycle sales was palpable in efforts bicycle boosters made to assure dealers and merchants that it was indeed a boon to sales.

The war-time economy and expectations that adults would sacrifice certain luxuries, such as meat, wheat, and even fuel provided an excellent opportunity to even sell bicycles to adults. Naturally, if the industry saw an opportunity to get adults back on bicycles it would, especially if it could maintain the sales of children’s bicycles in the process. While the heightened sense of patriotism that accompanied the war was useful in marketing the bicycle, so too was the idea of buying goods constructed of the best materials because it demonstrated a degree of conservation. A well-made bicycle was likely to hold up year after year. Therefore, consumers might prefer an expensive bike over a cheaper model that might have to be replaced sooner. This too could allow them to feel that they were making a decision which conserved raw materials that were

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60 “Boy Scouts Bikers Prepare for War” *MotorCycling and Bicycling* December 22, 1917, 45. Of course, there was also the fact that the U.S. government had ordered the production of 100,000 bicycles to assist in the war effort.

61 B.F. Goodrich Company “War helps your sales to these tire users” *MotorCycling and Bicycling* October 22, 1917, 36.
important to the war effort, like steel. W.P. Farrell, a bicycle manufacturer concluded, “Better than low prices is quality. Due to the war and preachments of economy, people reason that it is more economical to buy a quality article rather than something cheap. This is true of a great many other articles and is especially true of the bicycle.”

As those in the industry who were aware of the benefits of the war for bicycle marketing might have nervously anticipated, the end of the war meant there was a very real chance that sales would suffer. Indeed, there was a decided ‘slacking up’ in sales soon after the war was over—as adult consumption of the bicycle began to wane once again. Still, the years 1916-1920 were relatively good for the bicycle industry. The total U.S. market “apparent consumption” topped 475,000 units per year for all five years. The best year by far was 1920, in which 750,000 bicycles were sold. Sales in 1921 and 1922, however, fell drastically to around 150,000.

Photos in the trade magazines demonstrated that as late as 1919, even adults were consuming the bicycle at a higher level than they had immediately before the war. Bicycle boosters argued that changes occurred because public transportation was too expensive and inefficient. In an attempt to exploit frustrations with public transportation, boosters suggested workers ride a bicycle. They explained, “Suppose that we have a mile or so to go to work. We have to start an hour earlier if we depend on the cars. What is nicer than to take the trusty old bike and start to work ten or fifteen minutes before you are due at the shop, and be sure of getting there on time and feel so much better than the average person that rides on a car?” Bicycle riders would not only feel better than

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average workers because of the vigor of exercise but also because “the car is full of all kinds of odors which have a tendency to make us feel stuffy and not up to our usual selves.” 66 There was also some quick math to show readers that if they took the car 300 days a year at 10 cents per day, they would be spending at least $30 a year and that a bicycle would be more cost effective. After one year, it would have paid for itself. The article ended by telling readers, “You will also find that you have been many more places than you would have been had you depended on the cars.” 66 This point made note of the liberation that could come with a bicycle. Cyclists were free to choose their own routes, whether they wanted to take the fastest route or the scenic route. Riding on a car presented workers with the same route, sights, and experience every day, making their lives feel just as limited and mechanized as the industries in which they worked. The bicycle offered freedom.

While sales seemed good in the first two quarters of 1919, leaders of the bicycle industry were aware that they were going to have to work together to maintain a similar level of output once the nation returned to “normalcy.” By July 1919, Motorcycle & Bicycle Illustrated was entreating members of the industry to attend the upcoming annual convention. A full-page ad in the magazine read, "Most important convention in years—big problems affecting reconstruction of the industry following peace are pressing for quick and practical solution. Now is the time to Get Business." 67 The primary objective of the convention was to find ways to boost sales for the entire industry. At the convention’s end, the industry was certain it had done just that. An announcement following the cycling convention touted the promise of a new era in bicycling marketing.

66 Ibid.
The headline read, "The Cycle Trades Under One Big Tent: How the League of Nations Idea Has Been Worked Out in the Cycle Trades of America..." The article triumphantly continued, "The Cycle Trades of America is the title of the Cycle League of Nations... a real governing constructive force, made up of all members who belong to the various associated bodies... empowered and equipped to do big things for the cycle and allied industries." The article noted that the decision came from a representative group of 283 tradesmen who attended the convention. This marked a renewed concentration on stimulating the sales of bicycles, parts, and accessories. Under this umbrella organization—like the MBC and Directorate—the industry could move in a relatively unified manner and take aim at reworking marketing schemes.

A collective decision in the industry to create the Cycle Trades of America (CTA) added some energy to the cooperative boosting effort as it strove to be better organized than its predecessors—the MBC and Directorate. Its chief objectives were to establish official headquarters in New York with a paid secretary to preside over the association and "execute the will of the C.T. of A. directors along the lines of cycle promotion and propaganda." More importantly, the CTA was responsible for overseeing and directing the advertising campaign to promote bicycles. They would do so with money contributed from bicycle manufacturers and parts makers. The association voted that funds for the "national publicity campaign" would be raised through a one percent levy on the business of all bicycle, parts, and accessory manufacturers. This reportedly gave the association

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69 Ibid.
70 Ibid, 14.
71 Ibid., 9.
72 Ibid.
an initial budget of around $150,000 as of September 1, 1919.\textsuperscript{73} The CTA, more than any other organization or individual, was a conglomerate that had a powerful influence over the direction of bicycle marketing. Much of its marketing reflected greater trends in the industry.

Almost immediately, the CTA set to work raising awareness of the opportunities to sell bicycles to adults for utilitarian purposes. The August 6, 1919, issue of *MotorCycling and Bicycling* included an article entitled “Bicycles in Industrial Transportation,” which contended, “An early morning ride for a mile or two in the fresh air and at the same time with sufficient exercise to exhilarate without tiring, is bound to bring the worker to the factory with a zest for work.”\textsuperscript{74} Factory owners, who were suggested to have come to the same conclusion, had already “bought quantities of bicycles, in turn selling them to their employees on the installment plan.”\textsuperscript{75} The industry now apparently saw value in creating advertisements that would speak to the laboring classes whereas it previously stuck to the middle and upper classes. Dealers were told to take advantage of industrial workers’ increasing use of bicycles by talking to local factory owners to see if some kind of plan or agreement could be worked out. Quotes from several factory representatives who favored workers’ use of bicycle were included in articles. A representative from the Underwood Typewriter Company said that his factory provided accommodations for 850 bicycles, adding that most of that space was indeed used by the employees.\textsuperscript{76} The president of The American Rolling Mill Company said, “You may be interested to know that no less than 1,600 of our men depend

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid, 15.
\textsuperscript{74} “Bicycles in Industrial Transportation” *MotorCycling and Bicycling* August 6, 1919, 33.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
absolutely upon the bicycle as a means of transportation." The article was accompanied by a number of pictures showing large bicycle sheds, numerous racks, and rows upon rows of bicycles outside and around various factories. Some also showed employees leaving work on their bicycles. Each picture had a caption explaining where it was taken. Companies such as the U.S. Armory and the Boston and Albany R.R. shops, United Shoe Machinery Co., Dayton Steel Foundry Co., Pierce Arrow Motor Car Co., Underwood Typewriter Co., National Cash Register Co., Smith & Wesson, and the Gilbert & Barker Co were all showcased throughout the August 6 and August 13 issues of the magazine. More than a simple suggestion that they market bicycles as transportation, these articles showed that adult workers and their employers already saw the value of bicycles. All manufacturers and merchants needed to do was be sure to supply the demand.

Figure 4.6. Bicycle parking.

77 Ibid., 34.
The fact that these employees were riding bicycles to work in such great numbers was also intended to serve as a source of encouragement and pride for bicycle merchants. Merchants and manufacturers could be proud that their product was so valuable in aiding workers’ commute to work and the bicycle’s important role in the manufacturing boom, which was vital in supplying Europe during, and shortly after, World War I.78

“Bicycles in Industrial Transportation” argued that industrial workers were increasingly turning to bicycles because of the shortage of cars as well as the cost and uncertainty of “ordinary means of transportation.”79 The article continued one of the lines of reasoning and support of the bicycle of the 1890s saying that bicycles were preferable because employees who used them to get to work arrived feeling refreshed and more prepared to put their energy into their work. An advertisement showcased in Printer's Ink made a similar point. It told workers, “Make your trips to and from work a pleasure instead of a mean ride on a hot, crowded car. Ride a bicycle. . . . The bicycle is the most economical mode of transportation.”80 The artwork featured two men on bicycles, wearing jackets and ties, passing a crowded streetcar with other men struggling to get on and off of the car. This ad was extremely reminiscent of previous advertisements from the turn of the century, which employed idealistic notions of manliness as a means of selling bicycles. In the pursuit of this goal, the ad stressed that the bicycle provided “the exhilarating tonic of fresh air and . . . the open country.”

79 “Bicycles in Industrial Transportation” MotorCycling and Bicycling August 6, 1919, 33. See table 4.1: The number of auto registrations continued to increase in 1918, 1919, and 1920, but the amount of new registrations in 1918 was 828,000 while it was 1.1 million in 1919 and 1.4 million in 1920.
80 Printer's Ink February 19, 1920, 26. Reproduced in: Herlihy, Bicycle, 324. Printer's Ink was a trade journal for the advertising industry that often included examples of noteworthy or exemplary advertisements.
bicycle was not only liberating, but also a healthy activity. The ad continued, “My, how good you feel! The red blood sings thru your veins, driving away those mean morning headaches and that old sluggish feeling! You get to work feeling like taking that old job and fairly ‘eating it up!’ Health and a clear brain go a long way towards making a successful man. A bicycle goes nearly all the way towards making a healthy man!”

Much like advertisements from the 1890s, one of which claimed, “Save $60 a year—have elegant time doing it—never felt so well—can do ten hours’ work in seven—salary raised yesterday—employers like healthful men,” these advertisements continued an old tactic to an entirely different generation as well as a slightly lower class of consumers. The advertisement of the 1890s mentioned salary, which suggests it was targeting middle class managerial types. The 1920 advertisement, while picturing a man in a hat and tie in the art did not make it as clear if he was of the working class or middle class. Also, this was part of a series of advertisements that stressed the economy of riding a bicycle rather than the streetcar.

This line of marketing, however, was somewhat short lived and centered around 1919 and early 1920. Judging by how quickly such advertisements disappeared from magazines and newspapers, the CTA soon gave up on the tactic. It was apparently ineffective at achieving the kind of returns the association sought. David Herlihy argues that at this moment, the CTA conceded defeat and “shift[ed] its focus back to the faithful juvenile market” due mostly to the increasingly affordable automobile. My research supports this conclusion but adds depth by showing other factors that contributed to the bicycle industry’s focus on the boy. Herlihy fails to consider that numerous industries

81 *Printer’s Ink* February 19, 1920, 26.
82 Pope Manufacturing Company, "Without Car Fare," *Scientific American*, October 8, 1892, 238.
were making a move toward marketing to children and the growth of childhood consumerism in general. Additionally, the bicycle industry did not target boys simply because adults were buying cars, there was also a belief that children’s consumer habits could be controlled. This aspect was crucial for an industry that wanted stable growth most of all. The fact that marketing abandoned adult consumers is evident but the move was not made solely because cars were becoming more affordable.

As the industry entered the first quarter of 1920, there was a sense of both optimism and pessimism for members of the bicycle industry. Sales were approximately 750,000 in 1920 but plummeted to 149,192 in 1921. By the last quarter of 1920, the sense that 1921 was going to be a lean year was setting in. *Motorcycling and Bicycling* called for opinions on the state of the industry in December, asking whether the “slump” would continue. Without much detail, one manager responded that 1921 would be a good year because people were in the bicycle riding habit and were not likely to forget it. He clarified that he did not necessarily believe a lot of bicycles would be sold in 1921, in comparison to years past, but it would be a good year for the sales of tires and accessories. Edward Arnhem, the general manager of Arnold, Schwinn & Co., offered a similar argument. He believed bicycles sales would stabilize in 1921 because the public’s taste had not changed. He argued that human nature never changed, boys, girls, men, and women would all desire the bicycle in 1921 just the same as they had in 1920. Arnhem’s suggestion, that “human nature never changes” was rather short sighted and

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overly simplistic.\textsuperscript{87} Otherwise, there would be no fads. While the basic principles of consumption and human need, or desire for the consumption of goods may stay relatively constant, the items that consumers choose to buy and their rationale for those purchases certainly changes over time. Rather than serving as an informative article, Arnhem’s views were more than likely included simply because he provided yet another respected voice in the industry, which encouraged everyone to remain optimistic.

Another attempt to inspire optimism, spoke of how the industry had experienced slumps before, such as “the slump of 1907 . . . and then again, in 1914. . .”\textsuperscript{88} The “slump of 1907” was more of a banking panic in which business experienced a brief yet severe contraction. It resulted in a significant decline in output and employment and ultimately led to the creation of the Federal Reserve System to protect against potential banking failures in the future.\textsuperscript{89} During 1913 and 1914 there was a minor depression “which was accentuated by the economic disorganization of the first few months of the European conflict.”\textsuperscript{90} Allied funds were liquidated and quickly exhausted leaving the United States to confront the question of whether to allow “the Allies to borrow funds from American bankers or of allowing purchases to fall off sharply with the probable consequence of a serious depression.”\textsuperscript{91} At first, preferring a strict definition of isolationism, the Wilson administration and Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan banned American loans. By March of 1915, however, they both relented proving the

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{88} Sam Fetter, “Present Conditions the Acid Test of Business,” \textit{MotorCycling and Bicycling} January 5, 1921, 11.  
panic to be short-lived as it was soon corrected by a “five-year period of enormous industrial and agricultural expansion caused in the first instance by increased European needs and later augmented by American participation in the war.” That expansion, however, ended shortly after the war came to a close, at the same time bicycle sales began to plummet.

Foreign Trade of the U.S., 1914-1921 (In millions of dollars)\(^\text{93}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Exports of Domestic Goods</th>
<th>Imports of Goods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>2,329.7</td>
<td>1,893.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>2,716.2</td>
<td>1,674.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>4,272.2</td>
<td>2,197.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>6,227.2</td>
<td>2,659.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>5,838.7</td>
<td>2,945.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>7,749.8</td>
<td>3,904.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>8,080.5</td>
<td>5,278.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>4,378.9</td>
<td>2,509.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The post-war depression was not immediate. There was actually a small boom in the last quarter to 1919 that lasted until the second quarter of 1920, which explains why the bicycle industry was still optimistic even months after the war’s conclusion. The economic historian, W. Elliot Brownlee argues that while it is tempting to credit pent-up

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\(^93\) This table is a partial reproduction of a more in depth table in, Faulkner’s, *American Economic History*, 585.
demand for consumer durables, it was actually the continued market for American
exports as well as an “inflationary psychology that pervaded the American buying
public.”⁹⁴ Even the Meade Cycle Company, who sold bicycles at extremely low
wholesale prices raised prices significantly during this time. Offering new models for as
low as $10 in 1914, their prices were up $15.75 by 1917.⁹⁵ Because of their experiences
seeing prices jump so drastically during the war, Americas who expected further hikes
attempted to preempt increasing sales prices.

The bicycle booster Sam Fetter hoped to inspire confidence among members of
the bicycle industry by suggesting the dips in sales they experienced in 1907 and 1914
were not as bad as most seemed to remember since they were over so quickly. In fact, he
claimed the slump of 1920 would be short as well and his company knew precisely when
it would end. Yet after giving it more consideration, he stated that a decision was made
not to share that knowledge with other members of the industry since it was such a great
advantage for his company. He suggested that he would be willing to share the
information with select members of the industry provided they sent him a request.⁹⁶ This
could have merely been a gimmick to procure business contacts, or a ploy to inspire
merchants to go after business with the same vigor and confidence they had when sales
were good. Either way, his comments seemed to contradict the spirit of cooperative
boosting other members of the bicycle industry had worked so hard to promote in years
prior.

⁹⁴ Brownlee, Dynamics of Ascent, 378.
⁹⁵ Meade Cycle Company, Popular Mechanics April 1914, 158; Meade Cycle Company, Popular
Mechanics April 1917, 193.
⁹⁶ Sam Fetter, “Present Conditions the Acid Test of Business,” MotorCycling and Bicycling January 5,
1921, 11.
Responses from those involved in the motorcycle industry made it apparent that the slump was indeed curtailing their business as well. They too conveyed concern about motorcycle sales in spite of attempts to sound optimistic. The vice president of the Carter Carburetor company, Hugh Weed, commented that at least the motorcycle and bicycle industry was not hit as hard as the automobile industry.\textsuperscript{97} Weed had no way of knowing just how drastically sales would drop in 1921 and 1922. His comments also reveal a general sense of confusion that both the bicycle and motorcycle industry suffered regarding the cause of slumping sales. He posited, “the present depression is more psychological than real” because there were no instances of “bad crops” or “other fundamental causes of real panics.”\textsuperscript{98} He failed to consider the sharp curtailment in the exporting of goods. He went on to explain, “What depression there is is due more to buyer’s timidity in the face of a general falling market than anything else.”\textsuperscript{99} Another member of the bicycle industry, A.H. Bartsch, argued that a slump in sales would actually be good for the bicycle industry. He advocated a free market view of the industry suggesting that the slump would foster a necessary “weeding out process.”\textsuperscript{100} He wrote, “[T]hose who have a substantial organization—an efficient selling organization—and economical production organization and an advertising department headed by a man of equal common sense should have no difficulty in weathering the battle of sales that opens

\textsuperscript{97} Hugh H.C. Weed, “The Thing to do Now is Fight,” \textit{MotorCycling and Bicycling} January 5, 1921, 13.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{100} A.H. Bartsch “1921 Marks the Biggest Battle of Brains Industry has Ever Known,” \textit{MotorCycling and Bicycling} January 5, 1921, 12.
This battle of sales would force members in the industry to be smarter and more efficient in their production and marketing techniques. Bartsch believed that sales would begin to pick up in the Spring and general prosperity in the industry could be expected to last possibly into 1925. That is, if many of the competitors “who have been pulling on [the] ‘business skirts’ . . . .” of others in the industry were eliminated.\(^\text{102}\)

The only contributors to the debate who were specific about problems their industry faced were Irving Beck and A.E. McGavin. Beck predicted a bright future and argued, “[the] banks and Federal Reserve system have shown their ability to cope with the most drastic financial situation that has ever occurred in the history of the world.”\(^\text{103}\) He proclaimed, “the unemployment situation has seen its worst days during the present depression and will take a strong turn in favor of re-employment after the first of the year.”\(^\text{104}\) As it would turn out, Beck was right. Unemployment rose from 5.2% in 1920 to 11.7% in 1921 but fell back to 6.7% in 1922.\(^\text{105}\) McGavin believed that the industry was actually doing better than in years past, aside from the fall of 1919, “when the demand far exceeded normal supply.”\(^\text{106}\) Here his comments suggest much of the fluctuation was due to a market trying to correct itself. The inability to meet demand in 1919 led to uncharacteristically high sales during the first part of 1920, which led to a dry spell in 1921. The economic historian W. Elliot Brownlee argues that there was a general overexpansion of inventories across American industries. The boom peaked in January

\(^\text{101}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{102}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{103}\) Irving Beck, “Plenty of Money Left, Cycle Dealers can get their Share,” MotorCycling and Bicycling, January 5, 1921, 13.
\(^\text{104}\) Irving Beck, “Plenty of Money Left, Cycle Dealers can get their Share,” MotorCycling and Bicycling, January 5, 1921, 13.
1920 and the lowest point of the depression came in July of 1921. The major problem during this period, in his opinion, was inflation.\textsuperscript{107} As the economy encountered a period of deflation to correct the inflation that occurred during and immediately after the war, the bicycle industry similarly faced a period of drastically lowered production in 1921 and 1922 to stabilize the uncharacteristically high level of production during the first three quarters of 1920.

In discussing some of the particular causes for stifled sales, McGavin explained, “The export situation has of course, been greatly handicapped on account of the attitude of banking institutions all over the world. In fact, this has been our greatest handicap during the past two and a half months, prior to which time we operated our maximum production.”\textsuperscript{108} If wartime was good for the bicycle industry because of increased laxity of regulations on exports and therefore the American bicycle industry was fulfilling much of the need for bicycles in Europe, then it was also true that peace had put an end to much of that, particularly after European countries recovered from the war. More importantly, the working class, who had took to the bicycle en masse during the war were now feeling increasingly insecure about their own economic prospects. McGavin detailed the state of the industry in the U.S. writing that they had not necessarily laid workers off, but they had cut their hours by 15 percent.\textsuperscript{109} In his opinion, the saving-grace of the bicycle industry was the fact that they had been steadfast in “under-producing in comparison to the demand.”\textsuperscript{110} This was a vestige of lessons learned from the bicycle boom of the 1890s when production went well beyond demand—driving down the price of bicycles.

\textsuperscript{107} Brownlee, \textit{Dynamics of Ascent}, 380.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
and arguably diminishing consumer desire for bicycles.\footnote{Burr, "Markets As Producers and Consumers," 280-2.} The sales figures for 1919-1922 suggest that the industry did not actually under-produce as much as it needed to as sales rose from 479,000 in 1919 to 750,000 in 1920 but then dropped drastically in 1921 and 1922 (see table 4.1).

W.D. Callender—publisher of \textit{MotorCycling and Bicycling}—described the first few months of 1921 as a period of readjustment. He implored dealers to place their orders immediately, arguing that manufacturers did not have enough volume in orders to keep the prices down. He wrote, “BUY IT NOW, Mr. Dealer, Mr. Jobber, Mr. Consumer. Buy it now because it probably won’t be less, and may be more. Buy it now because it is your duty to do your share in equilibrizing the present trade situation.”\footnote{W.D. Callender, “Buy it Now,” \textit{MotorCycling and Bicycling}, February 2, 1921, 3-7.} He went on to suggest it was a “civic duty” to buy what they could during the “period of readjustment.”\footnote{Ibid.} Callender also employed a quote by Henry Ford, “the sage of Detroit,” to inspire dealers and jobbers.\footnote{Ibid.} “Our cars, and trucks and tractors are now as low as they can be, but we are not getting orders enough. If we don’t get more orders, we will be forced to increase our prices.”\footnote{Ibid.} Like Ford, Callender was writing on behalf of manufacturers and making an argument that the hesitancy to buy was bad business for everyone in the industry. Low volume production would increase the cost manufacturers had to invest in each unit. Those costs were then passed on to the merchants and jobbers. 1921 was clearly a year in which the industry struggled to adjust to a contracting economy after World War I. It also marked a new phase of bicycle marketing in which adults received less and less attention while children received more and more.
As industry marketing moved away from adults, it renewed its commitment to the type of juvenile advertising employed before the war. Even though the war was now over, ideas of citizenship, health, and manhood remained the subject of ads directed at boys. The specter of world war had, no doubt, put the U.S. on notice that the pride and enjoyment they took in their country could not be guaranteed unless there were future generations of strong, patriotic citizens at the helm. The bicycle, much like the Boy Scouts, was a tool to help young Americans develop. In fact, the bicycle and Boy Scouts were often promoted together as a means for instilling confidence, strength and self-reliance in American boys. In this manner, the bicycle was still promoted on the basis of masculinity except now it was more focused on ideals of adolescent masculinity rather than adult masculinity. Many of the ideals expressed shared much in common with those that were used to promote the bicycle at the turn of the century. It was as if those ideals had become so natural and commonplace that expectations for attaining them were moved forward in time for citizens who were younger in age. At the same time, the possession of a certain amount of boyhood exuberance came to be expected of adult males. Historian Woody Register refers to this as “Peter Pan Manhood.” In accordance with the idea “a man, in order to achieve and enjoy the full benefits of American life should never stop playing or being a boy.”\(^{116}\) Once all vestiges of this boyish nature, which was now controlled, were lost, so too was the ideal man.\(^{117}\) He then moved on into the realm of old manhood; a decidedly weaker and less virile stage of masculinity.


\(^{117}\) Charles E. Pratt, *The American Bicycler: A Manual for the Observer, the Learner, and the Expert* (Boston: Houghton, Osgood and Company, 1879), 30-32. Pratt proclaimed, “As a sport, bicycling is manly, innocent, humane and rational.” He defined the bicycle’s manly virtues as its ability to develop “The training of eye and ear, the alertness and suppleness of limb and joint and muscle, the quick observation, the prompt decision in emergency, the strength and courage and self reliance.”
Bicycle promoters not only asked consumers to take their word about the benefits of the bicycle, they continually employed the help of healthcare experts in extolling the virtues of their product. Martin A. Delaney, a “physical adviser for the city of Chicago,” explained that bicycles were an ideal vehicle for boys’ clubs. He wrote, “I would suggest that the boys spend their vacations riding through the country on their bicycles. It appeals to me as the one best way to find real pleasure and at the same time improve physical condition. It is just the outing that should appeal to many who otherwise could not afford a vacation.”\footnote{Martin A. Delaney “Boys’ Clubs Can Spend Vacation Best on Bicycles,” \textit{MotorCycling and Bicycling}, July 16, 1917, 35.} Delaney claimed he wrote the article in response to questions from boy readers about how they should spend their summer.

Boys were encouraged to ride bicycles but only in moderation. Just as men had attempted to define the parameters of female participation in cycling, they also sought to restrict how much strength and health was appropriate for boys. Delaney was careful to point out the circumscribed masculinity of juvenile bicycles. Boys could work toward achieving manhood as long as they did not succeed or go too quickly. He cautioned boys not to overdo it imploring them, “Never ride after you become fatigued. I would also advise against crouching over the handlebars.”\footnote{Ibid. Crouching over the bars was a reference to racing posture and therefore associated with extreme physical exertion.} In 1890, men admonished women much the same way for riding with their “bodies bent well forward, knees up and down . . . struggling along with purple faces and hair awry.”\footnote{William Blackwood and Sons, “Modern Mannish Maidens,” \textit{Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine} 148, no. 892 (February 1890): 255. For a discussion of women’s position on bicycles see: Ellen Gruber Garvey, “Reframing the Bicycle: Advertising-Supported Magazines and Scorching Women” \textit{American Quarterly} 47, No. 1 (March, 1995): 75.} Delaney’s article was accompanied by updates on the progress of members of the boys’ clubs, and other individuals, who were completing long adventurous rides over the summer. Boys were
encouraged to go on multi-day trips as long as they paced themselves. Even though they were discouraged from exerting themselves too much, the acceptable amount of time spent on a bicycle was greater than it was for women or girls. No mention was made of girls even participating in multi-day bicycle trips. After all, these trips were meant to train boys to be men.

Now, instead of doctors telling adults to ride bicycles for health, they told children. Other trustworthy figures joined in to exalt the health benefits of bicycles. Even Santa Claus took part. One advertisement composed as if it were a letter from Santa proclaimed, “Every boy and girl who rides a bicycle is not as likely to have to be put to bed sick and have to take nasty medicine, because the bicycle makes them breathe more fresh air, makes their muscles strong and keeps colds, mumps and measles away.”

While boys represented a wholesome—yet not fully developed—version of masculinity, they were also a convenient opportunity for the industry to maintain steady sales. Black Beauty Bicycles told potential consumers, “physicians advise parents to get bicycles for their boys and girls . . . a health builder . . . that has made bicycle riding a fine form of exercise that stimulates the circulation of the blood, hardens the muscles and helps to develop every organ of the body. Besides being better than medicine it takes boys and girls out-of-doors, into God’s own pure air and sunshine, where there are ever varying joys of sport, speed and sightseeing.”

Rather than entirely redefining the bicycle, the industry was able to incorporate older, established marketing schemes to a younger audience. The bicycle maintained a certain image of masculinity. Instead of

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providing a means of affirming manhood, however, the bicycle became an initiating
device in which boys attained adolescent forms of masculinity and thereby prepared for
manhood.

Bicycle promoters told merchants to stress the health benefits of the bicycle and
to promote it as a natural physical outlet for their customers’ sons and daughters. These
strategies of selling bicycles were not only adopted in advertisements; merchants who
mailed personal letters to prospective buyers’ homes also used them. A letter from Jones
Cyclery reminded a father who was recently in the store, “Nothing equals the bicycle as a
developer of sturdy bodies, strong lungs, ruddy cheeks, bright eyes, and self reliance in
your growing boy. You can buy your boy nothing that will give him more pleasure or do
him more good.”

The CTA continued to use ideas of patriotism and citizenship to market bicycles
to boys as well. It created art and copy for distribution to merchants who agreed to use it
in their own personalized advertisements, which appeared in local newspapers. The
CTA also created national advertisements. One such ad in the Saturday Evening Post
pictured a group of boys who appeared to be scouts mounting their bicycles (fig., 4.6). It
asked, "Does Your Boy Have This Opportunity? Does he have the glorious chance to
develop himself physically and mentally in the happy way a bicycle brings?" One of the
ways in which ideals of physical and mental development were combined was by leading
boys on bicycle rides to places of “historical and civic interest.” The boys shown in the
advertisement are at Washington’s headquarters at Valley Forge. It informed readers,
"The Bicycle Clubs all over this country are contributing more to the young manhood of

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124 Cycle Trades of America, Sixth Annual Year Book 1924-25 (New York: Peter J. Carey & Sons, Inc.,
Printers, 1925), 11.
America than almost anything else. . . . The clear steady eye—active, alert mind and clean, healthful body of a bicycle boy or girl are beyond valuation.” The girls were tacked on as an afterthought. By 1920, it is estimated that there were more than 70,000 Girl Scouts nationwide, yet no mention was made of the Girl Scouts nor was there any attention directed at girls specifically. Even though there were some ads reminding dealers to remember girls, the majority of attention was directed at boys.\textsuperscript{125} The ad also encouraged a grassroots movement among American youth to start their own bicycle clubs. “Give your boy a bicycle. If there isn't a club in his neighborhood, inspire him to be the organizer.”\textsuperscript{126} The advertisement was included in \textit{Motorcycle and Bicycle Illustrated} as an example of how the CTA was attempting to increase bicycle sales among boys. Members of the industry were expected to see this sample advertisement and follow the example by appealing to the "young manhood of America."

\textsuperscript{125} Girl Scouts. \url{http://girlscouts.org/who_we_are/history/timeline/1912_1919.asp}
\textsuperscript{126} "Does Your Boy Have This Opportunity?" \textit{Motorcycle and Bicycle Illustrated}, February 24, 1921, 31.
Does Your Boy Have This Opportunity?

The Bicycle Clubs all over the country are contributing more to the young manhood of America than almost anything else. They offer the cleanest, most invigorating form of sport and exercise. By their trips to places of historical and civic interest, they offer a wealth of education.

Does your boy own a bicycle? Has he the opportunity to become a member of one of these clubs? Does he have the glorious chance to develop himself physically and mentally in the happy way a bicycle brings?

Ride a Bicycle

The cost of operating a bicycle is practically nothing. Its value to your boy cannot be measured by the small initial price. The clear, steady eye—active, alert mind and clean, healthful body of a bicycle boy or girl are beyond valuation.

Give your boy a bicycle. If there isn’t a club in his neighborhood, inspire him to be the organizer. And you’ll find a wonderful source of pleasure if you’ll lead them on some trips yourself—riding your own bike with the best of them. See a bicycle dealer now and talk it over.

A sample advertisement being run by the Cycle Trades of America in the Saturday Evening Post

Figure 4.7. Does your boy have this opportunity?
Even though the industry’s focus was clearly on boys, other sections of the market were not to be entirely forsaken. This was especially true for merchants who were reminded that anyone was a potential customer, including women, men, and girls. One article proclaimed, "The object of promoters is to interest every man, woman, girl and boy who is attracted to the bicycle, first of all, but there are not restrictions." A separate article reminded salesmen, "don't overlook the girls. Trade among the girls may be stimulated in the same manner as the boys and a great deal of business would result." While the industry seemed desperate in reiterating that every individual represented a potential sale, as far as advertising dollars were concerned, there was clearly a more concerted effort to sell bicycles to boys. One store owner explained, "In my advertising budget I direct 90 per cent of my advertising toward the boy. . . ." Boys represented the future of the nation. As adults, they would lead and protect their country. While they represented a more malleable and developing form of masculinity, they were also, thereby, a convenient opportunity for the industry. Instead of entirely redefining the bicycle, the industry was able to incorporate older, established marketing schemes to a younger audience.

The CTA led the charge in shifting bicycle marketing to boys but other industries were noticing the power of juvenile consumerism as well. One of those who quickly realized the value of advertising to boys was the Sprague Publishing Company, which published American Boy magazine. The Sprague Publishing Company ran advertisements in bicycle trade magazines that reminded bicycle and parts manufacturers

129 "It's the Boy who creates the demand of bicycles!" Motorcycle and Bicycle Illustrated, June 2, 1921, 40.
their juvenile magazine, *American Boy* was the perfect means of reaching their new audience. One advertisement called attention to the disproportionate share of the market that boys represented. It claimed that based on the statistical data provided by surveying 288 dealers from across the U.S., "71 percent of bicycles are bought by persons under 21 years of age."130 Curiously, even though the statistical data is too broad to conclude that these sales were necessarily to boys and not girls, the advertisement feels free to make that assumption.

**Figure 4.8. How the boy market stacks up.**

As a magazine with a predominantly juvenile audience, *American Boy* was better served by an exaggeration of the survey's conclusions. Taking advantage of an exaggeration in statistics, Sprague's ad compared, "How the boy market stacks up for size!" It told manufacturers and merchants, "the boy market is both your most reliable market for steady volume of sales—and your greatest source of sales." It went on to discuss the virtues of the boy market as "a great, natural demand that responds most readily to your own efforts to develop it."\(^{131}\) Not only was there an appeal to manhood in the manner bicycles were advertised to boys, but there was also an appeal to manufacturers' inherent paternalism. The boy market represented a section that was loyal, virtuous, and more importantly, it was a group that could easily be molded and manipulated by marketing and clever sales tactics. Obviously, companies would want to try to reach this ideal market because it represented a safe opportunity that could be controlled.\(^{132}\)

*American Boy* reminded readers that the majority of bicycle consumers were adolescents. It claimed, "Out of recent buyers of Harley-Davidson Bicycles who stated their ages on registration cards, 58.1% were 16 years old and younger. There's no getting way from the fact that the bicycle dealer who goes after the boy trade gets the biggest

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\(^{132}\)The idea that children were passive consumers who were easily convinced by marketing tactics was pervasive among advertisers at the time but by the 1930s they would prove to be somewhat sophisticated consumers. See; E. Evalyn Grumbine McNally, *Reaching Juvenile Markets: How to Advertise, Sell, and Merchandise Through Boys and Girls* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company Inc., 1938), 116. By 1938, Grumbine was cautioning advertisers “to be mindful of children’s consumer savvy.” Quoted in: Jacobson, *Raising Consumers*, 203. See also; 184. She makes a correction to the “conventional histories of children’s marketing” which have perpetuated the assumption that children were gullible and obedient consumers who were exploited by advertisers. As she shows, advertisers soon found that children were not as pliant as they hoped.
share of the pie.”

Echoing the extolment of the boy market, the ad continued, "Boys are natural prospects for bicycles. And the great volume of advertising for bicycles and accessories to boys in THE AMERICAN BOY makes his going still easier." Boys were valued as consumers not only because they were thought to be loyal and easily swayed by advertising, but also because they were considered highly susceptible to peer pressure and jealousy. Dealers were encouraged to go for group rides with their boy customers and told that “if the kids have good times they’ll tell all the other lads and get them to buy bikes from your store.”

There was a picture accompanying the message which showed four boys who had stopped along the road to climb and sit on a downed tree, where they could talk and enjoy nature. C.B.T. Hamilton, a Wichita dealer, recounted how he used child envy to sell bicycles by targeting the children of a “well-to-do oil man.” He began with appeals to the father but then had his own wife talk to their mother and finally, he sold a bicycle to a boy on the same block. While delivering the bike, he stopped by the oil man’s house to show his sons the bike and to let them know where he was taking it. Once delivered, he then encouraged the new owner to make sure to show it off to all his friends in the neighborhood. By Christmas, the oil man had visited the shop and the negotiations for two bicycles began. This revealed that advertising and marketing professionals were still guided by the rationale that if they could sell the upper class boy first, he would sell the rest of the neighborhood even if it was done passively.

133 “The Biggest Share of the Pie,” Motorcycle and Bicycle Illustrated, March 10, 1921, 30.
134 Ibid.
135 MotorCycling and Bicycling, January 19, 1921, 31.
137 Ibid.
The Sprague Publishing Company continued the tactic of exalting the virtues of the boy market in their advertisements directed at manufacturers, yet their claims became increasingly bold. One of their ads featured a letter from the Miami Cycle and Mfg. Company in which the sales manager applauded the Sprague Company's marketing scheme writing, "The boy market should always be foremost in our minds." Sprague argued, "The boy market is a natural demand. Every boy expects a bicycle as his birthright. All effort spent in developing boy prospects brings the big, immediate sales, the volume of dependable business on which you can bank. The basic soundness of the bicycle trade for years has rested in the boy market. It is no question with the boy as to whether he shall have a bicycle. The big question to him is 'which bicycle?'" This sentiment came to be widely accepted by industry leaders and was echoed by a photo.

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138 “First for Sales!” *Motorcycle and Bicycle Illustrated*, April 7, 1921, 68.
139 Ibid.
included in the February 9, 1921, issue of *MotorCycling and Bicycling*. The caption read, “A bike is the birthright of every American Boy.” In it, a young man posed with one hand on the seat of his bicycle amidst a lush valley.

Simultaneously, the CTA was working to make the promotion of boyhood and bicycles synonymous by moving the celebration of bicycle week to coincide with the celebration of National Boys’ Week.\(^{140}\) Even bicycle week changed as the industry concentrated more fully on boys after the slump in 1921. In years prior, the bicycle industry celebrated Bicycle Day, and then Bicycle Week, at different months of the year depending on the state’s location. Southern and Western states often celebrated a little sooner than the rest of the country, which waited until May, a time when the weather was

more suitable for promoting and riding bicycles. The CTA, however, decided to make the late April/early May date official for the entire country to cut down on confusion and, more importantly, because members wanted to combine Bicycle Week with National Boys’ Week. The New Departure Company made sure the readers of Boys’ Life knew about the event with a notice that said, “Bicycle week is only another way of saying ‘Boys week’. Boyhood without a bicycle is like a summer without flowers. This week is yours.” The campaign was reportedly a great success. The CTA would report that “many bicycles are sold to children prior to the close of school.” Members were informed that “Newspapers in several cities ran races and parades in co-operation with the local dealers; authorities, Y.M.C.A.s, Boy Scouts, Rotary Clubs, and other civic organizations fostered exclusive bicycle activities or had bicycle events as leading features of programs.”

By the 1920s, several industries joined with the bicycle industry to market their products to children. Advertising professionals seemingly had their own tactic of using peer pressure used against them. An advertisement for The Boys’ World told advertising professionals, “Boyhood recollections are the ones remembered best. The sound commercial importance of this fact is being successfully applied by a growing number of national advertisers.” An example was given of how a cereal company was focusing their entire campaign on boys. Boys’ World claimed, “the advertising campaign in the

142 New Departure, Boys Life May, 1922, 45.
144 Ibid., 14.
boy field” was doubly effective because it produced immediate results and inspired “future good will that insures tomorrow’s market.”

By 1923, the Christmas campaign had become a staple of the industry, led by the Cycle Trades of America. The CTA gave detailed information about the campaign in their year book, stating that 1924 was their “second attempt at advertising bicycles at Christmas time, and while the result showed fewer complete pages of dealer advertising than in the previous year, there was quite an increase in the number of half pages and less.” In general, the only other annual opportunity for children to get such a relatively expensive toy would be on his or her birthday. Implicit in many of these advertisements was the idea that if parents had not, or would not, buy their child a bicycle, they were somehow failing them. The guilt that a parent would feel in depriving their child of something that other kids had would be a strong motivation for buying. Bicycle retailers also made sure to relieve parents of the burden of such an expensive gift by establishing payment plans. The Meade Cycle Company ran advertisements for its Ranger bicycle in numerous magazines calling attention to its 30 day free trial and 12 month period in which to pay. A report from Akron, Ohio, attested to the success of the Christmas campaign claiming to have “unprecedented bicycle sales . . . with the near advent of the Christmas season. Survey of the several dealers in the greater Akron area the past week disclosed sales are far ahead of last year at this time and almost double those of years previous. Even pre-war days failed to give dealers such a volume of bicycle business.”

One dealer reported to not only selling more bikes—60 bikes sold with two weeks until

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146 Ibid.
Christmas and expectations of selling over 100—but selling bikes of a higher price on average than the year before.\textsuperscript{150}

Other methods of selling the bicycle combined the benefits of a greater emphasis on consumerism during Christmas with year-round appeal targeting desires for strong healthy children. Industry leaders suggested that dealers try another circular intended for parents to read their children as a bedtime. This way, the sale could be made to the child and parent simultaneously. In the story, Santa asks children to remember to send him letters to let him know what they want for Christmas. He goes on to tell them, “I am always especially glad to receive letters from children telling me that they want bicycles and wheel toys because I know that they are the most useful things in my whole shop. They last always, they make it easy and jolly for children to go anywhere, to do errands for papa and mama, to have fun in races and cross-tag, and above all they keep children who ride them strong and healthy.”\textsuperscript{151} These ideas were continually reiterated in advertisements and marketing directed at the children but coming from Santa, an omniscient God-like entity, they could be trusted, at least in the children’s eyes. Of course, Santa mentioned the specific store that he wanted the child to go to in order to pick out the exact make and model he or she wanted. While the probability that merchants took the time to mail out circulars such as these and that parents would go so far as to read the stories to their child—telling them to ask for a bicycle—was slight, the point is not that this is how the industry sold bicycles. Rather, it is a story of the adaptations made by the industry to try to sell bicycles.

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{151} “A Just-Before-Christmas Letter from Santa Claus” \textit{MotorCycling (Including the Bicycling World)} December 9, 1925, 39. Dealers were told to try a similar letter on their customers for Christmas trade.
The bicycle industry’s increasing emphasis on selling their products during the Christmas season appeared effective precisely because it became a staple of the industry. In this manner, the industry took advantage of cultural changes that made childhood consumerism more common. It also helped to reshape the image of the bicycle as a toy rather than a means of transportation for adults. It was something to be given as a gift for pleasure, not like a necessity that is bought when it is needed.

World War I inspired a heightened focus on patriotism and stressed a need for strong, healthy children who represented the future of the country. The bicycle offered a chance to fortify children and prepare them for adulthood by offering healthy exercise and independence. Members of the bicycle industry seized the opportunity to market bicycles to boys as a means to become healthy citizens and by 1922 it seemed marketing efforts were paying off. The Boy Scouts of America had come to readily use the bicycle in their activities. Articles written by leaders of the Scouts, including the founder, Dan Beard, titled “Hiking and Camping with a Bicycle” and similarly, “Bike Hiking” by W.C. Wessel offered information on how Boy Scouts could use their bicycles during scouting excursions. Boys’ magazines also included stories about young male protagonists whose dreams came true when they got their first bicycle and others about boys who used bicycles for adventure. A story in St. Nicholas told of a boy who saved up his money for a bicycle he really wanted but then he unselfishly uses the money to buy his mother a birthday present instead. He soon wins a $50 prize along with a blue ribbon for a tomato he grew but when he returns to the bicycle shop he finds the bicycle he wanted most was already sold. After arriving home disappointed his mother tells him to go feed the

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152 Dan Beard, “Hiking and Camping with a Bike” Boys’ Life May 1922, 26; W.C. Wessel, “Bike Hiking” Boys’ Life May 1922, 27.
chickens and he suddenly sees that his own mother bought the bicycle for him as a reward for being such a good son.\textsuperscript{153} An adventure story about a young detective tells of how he rode his bicycle all the time and because of that he knew “more about the surrounding country than anyone in his class.”\textsuperscript{154} He then uses that knowledge and his bicycle to save the day.

There were also real stories or testimonials from children themselves in magazine pages. When \textit{St. Nicholas} invited readers to participate in a writing contest describing their happiest moment, William Biscoe (Age 11) described feelings that seemed straight out of an industry advertisement. “When I was a very small boy, I wished very much for a bicycle. If I could only have one, like my companions, for my very own! That was my only thought day and night.”\textsuperscript{155} Biscoe goes on to recount how he received his first bicycle as a surprise and how it was the happiest moment of his life. Another reader submitted story by thirteen year-old Louise Corcoran recounted waking up on her eleventh birthday only to be disappointed to find that none of her birthday presents were “special.” Once she got home from school, however, she found a new bicycle waiting for her in the garage. She wrote, “I was so surprised and happy that for a moment I couldn’t say a word, for this was the thing I had wanted to most but had least expected to have. . . . This was my very happiest memory.”\textsuperscript{156} The inclusion of such stories in children’s magazines made it apparent that a bicycle was indeed a very important, if not crucial, part of the American childhood experience. These stories validated much of the bicycle industry’s marketing strategy.

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{153} David Q. Hammond, “The Blue Byke” \textit{St. Nicholas} 48 no. 2 July 1921, 712-717.
\item \textsuperscript{154} G.G. Livermore, “Snooper Smith, Detective” \textit{Boys’ Life} May 1922, 16.
\item \textsuperscript{155} William S. Biscoe, “A Happy Incident” \textit{St. Nicholas} 48 no. 2 July, 1921, 859.
\item \textsuperscript{156} Louise Corcoran, “My Happiest Memory (A True Story)” \textit{St. Nicholas} May 1920, 666.
\end{itemize}
The success of the Christmas campaign and general marketing to children was also revealed by the bicycle industry’s report to President Roosevelt in 1934. The industry admitted that by 1923, their product had clearly began to change from a means of transportation to a “plaything for children.”\textsuperscript{157} That same report revealed that by 1928 the industry had become “highly seasonal . . . due to the fact that bicycles are so largely used as Christmas presents for children.”\textsuperscript{158} By the late 1920s sales had recovered somewhat from the slump in 1921 and 1922 but the industry was still far from the output experienced at the end of the nineteenth century. Disappointed and lacking confidence in its ability to sell adult models after 1920, the industry seemed to give up on consumers who were old enough to drive a car. Its marketing goals had clearly changed. Those changes helped transform bicycle consumption and alienated adult consumers by focusing on and catering to children. The bicycle industry enacted these tactics in the pursuit of increased sales, but it inadvertently altered the image of the bicycle and inextricably linked it to childhood.

Throughout the 1910s, the bicycle industry continued to make appeals to adults. In the first half of the decade the industry busied itself trying to increase business, most noticeably by trying to expand the bicycles’ appeal first to women and then to children. Initial attempts at selling to children were apparent in the Christmas campaign but by 1917 the bicycle industry was clearly employing ideals of citizenship and consumerism to market their product to boys. As the war progressed, the industry experienced a boost in sales as industrial workers took up cycling for utilitarian purposes and exports to Europe rose significantly.

\textsuperscript{157} National Recovery Administration, “Code of Fair Competition for the Bicycle Manufacturing Industry” Approved Code No. 437, Registry No. 1407-1-02 (Approved on May 21, 1934), 288.
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 289.
After the brief attempt to step up marketing to adults in 1919-1920, the bicycle industry—finding success in their advertising campaign to children during the war—began to focus on children. While the industry clearly began marketing to children as early as 1915, by 1922 boys were the primary target of bicycle marketing strategies. This would be so for many decades to come. As the bicycle and childhood became more closely linked and expectations of consumerism increased, children grew noticeably more sophisticated, savvy, and independent.

For a moment, the industry was encouraged by the increased number of adults using bicycles. Patriotic notions of sacrificing luxuries for the war effort and the restrictions on gasoline usage as well as rising costs of public transportation all played a role but the fact that bicycle ads targeted industrial workers shows that the availability of work, which now enabled the lower classes to afford bicycles, was more significant than those from the middle and upper class who came back to cycling to conserve war materials. The slumping economy, which led to increased unemployment and even the return to pre-war levels of production meant the lower class could no longer easily afford luxuries like the bicycle and the middle and upper class had no need for it. As a result, the bicycle industry, realizing it had little hope of selling adults without the help of outside forces, renewed its focus on boys but now more wholeheartedly. The growing support of childhood consumerism across numerous industries was encouraging. Printers’ Ink and advertising experts all argued boys were ideal consumers who influenced their whole family and peers. As a relatively new consumer group, they offered a new opportunity for the industry to boost sales. After the industry switched its focus to children, its tactics remained relatively unchanged from those of the 1890s. The
success the bicycle industry would find among juveniles was somewhat slow in coming but it did come. The industry would not only maintain its focus on boys over the next few decades, it would even go so far as to design their product in ways more appealing to children.
CHAPTER FIVE: “LESSONS OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION

Before the Great Depression, the bicycle industry suffered through extremely lean years. Standard accounts of business and consumerism would lead one to assume things would only get worse after 1929, but that was not the case. Even though the entire economy was on a downward spiral with consumers buying significantly less—hiding money in safe deposit boxes and under mattresses—bicycle sales showed no significant decline. This was true even in 1932, when nearly 12 million workers were unemployed.\(^1\) As figure 5.1 shows, sales were decidedly worse during the recession of 1921—when around 5 million workers were unemployed—than any time during the Depression.\(^2\) After 1932, bicycle sales began a steady climb. In fact, bicycle sales would skyrocket during the Depression and hold steady after World War II. Again, this runs counter to the narrative of various other consumer goods in the U.S. The historian Lizabeth Cohen points out, it would take the U.S. government’s decision to become an “arsenal of democracy” to “restaff factories and restuff[f] wallets for the first time in years. Those favorable conditions in turn produced others: booming demand for consumer products, record-breaking retail sales, and the creation of even more jobs to manufacture and to sell long coveted goods. Production of refrigerators increased 164 percent in the first six months of 1941 over the average for 1935-1939; automobiles were up 55 percent and other consumer durables followed suit.”\(^3\) Yet, bicycle sales reached record levels in 1936 with 1,233,000 units sold. By then, it was apparent that the bicycle industry had a more

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successful strategy than numerous other industries. What that strategy was, however, seemed lost on many within the industry.

![Bicycles purchased per year in the U.S.](image)

**Figure 5.1. Bicycles purchased in the U.S., 1921-1933**

The secret to success was marketing the bicycle to juveniles. At the same time, it hindered the bicycle’s marketability among adults. This was a price the industry was willing to pay. If the experiences of the past had taught bicycle manufacturers anything, it was that adults were not the key to stabilizing their market. Again in 1936, they would see that increased adult participation in cycling certainly added a nice boost to sales, but it did not provide the kind of numbers that could be depended on or accurately predicted. While the industry’s marketing and production designs seriously altered the way Americans would think about the bicycle—not necessarily in a positive way—they also induced the type of record sales that other industries would not experience until after World War II.
This chapter focuses on the cultural changes from 1920-1940 and how they affected marketing and consumption of the bicycle. It considers alterations in American society during the inter-war years, with a focus on changes spurred by the booming automotive industry. The bicycle industry not only addressed concerns about safety issues regarding the prospect of automobile and bicycle traffic on the same roads, but it was simultaneously affected and inspired by its competition. The challenge for the American bicycle industry was to find a way to survive and thrive in a world with autos, rather than in place of them. This marked an era in which bicycle design would change to appear more like cars, motorcycles, and airplanes—a development that not only signaled the capitulation of the bicycle industry to motorized vehicles, but also worked to instill in children a love for adult consumer items that were antithetical to the bicycle. The result was a child who would grow up longing to dismount his clunky bicycle for a real car, a real motorcycle, or a real opportunity to fly in an airplane. Once juveniles reached the appropriate age, they would abandon the bicycle for the real thing—the thing they had imagined their bikes to be all along.

One way in which these changing ideals surfaced was through Americans’ move to suburban communities. This, in turn, had a significant impact on transportation and recreation. As the 1920s progressed, the automobile became an increasingly important part of consumer culture in the United States. While automotive culture in the U.S. was indeed waxing, the popularity of the bicycle was waning, at least for adults. Previous studies have posited that the bicycle was replaced by the car, but few have elaborated on how this happened. David Herlihy points out that by the late 1930s the industry was shifting from marketing bicycles as affordable transportation for adults to a fun and
practical commodity for children. Steven Riess argues, "While in other parts of the world the bicycle remained an important mode of transportation and a major sporting device, Americans increasingly regarded it as a child's toy. The car replaced the bicycle in the hearts of Americans because it was more exciting and ownership conferred greater prestige." Both of these points have merit. This chapter offers an in-depth analysis that highlights why the bicycle industry allowed, even encouraged, this shift to occur.

David Herlihy briefly points out that the cycle industry “mounted an impressive comeback in the 1930s.” He attributes it to increased participation in recreation, economically devastated adults coming back to the bike for cheap transportation and the success of the balloon tire for children’s models. This study builds on his points about recreational interests and the importance of balloon tires (as well as other alterations in design) but it takes issue with the assumption that adults bought bicycles as a cheap alternative form of transportation. More importantly, it demonstrates that the 1920s and 1930s were pivotal decades for the American bicycle industry that led to a sea change in our conception of mobility and consumerism.

The historian, Robert Smith also gives comparatively little attention to these years. Smith explains that the “bicycle made little noise” in the 1920s but that there was a “bicycle revival” in the 1930s, which were “grim” years for the automobile. He cites a contemporary newspaper report “that Americans had taken once again to the cycle because it was the most convenient means at hand to express their biological and spiritual dissatisfaction with the machine age” but quickly shoots the reporter’s theory down.

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6 Herlihy, *Bicycle*, 327.
Failing to consider the resurgence in adult cycling, Smith argues the revival “was a phenomenon confined predominantly to youngsters.”\(^7\) In fact, among the few books about the history of the bicycle in the U.S. that do exist, none devote more than a few paragraphs to the bicycle during the Great Depression. This leaves their authors little room to elicit an understanding of the complex relationship between American culture and the bicycle during the period or the profound effect that relationship had on the bicycle industry.

By 1925, many Americans had abandoned cycling not necessarily because they preferred cars, but also because automobiles had become so pervasive and were moving at such high speeds that people began to see cycling as increasingly dangerous.\(^8\) Unlike the dangers that the Ordinary (high wheeled) bicycle presented, dangers which could be overcome with courage and athletic ability, the dangers of riding a bicycle in light of increased automobile traffic were much more difficult to spin into a positive for bicycle consumers. Simultaneously, with the children’s marketing campaign well under way, the

\(^7\) Robert A. Smith, *A Social History of the Bicycle: Its Early Life and Times in America* (New York: American Heritage Press, 1972), 246-7. His proof that it was a phenomenon confined to youngsters is based on the developments during World War II. “The bicycle was immediately seen as a partial solution to the problem of gasoline rationing, and the government encouraged bicycle makers to produce more. But it is significant that the production of all children’s machines was halted, and these had accounted for 85 per cent of those produced in 1941.” I agree that children’s models were most important to the success of the industry but find the similar trends in bicycle and automobile consumption to be more convincing. That is, the same years that bicycle consumption was highest during the decade so to was automobile consumption. At the same time, the boost in popularity of cycling as sport and leisure among adults undoubtedly had a positive impact on the industry, even if it was a short-lived fad. Bicycle sales continued to increase after the Great Depression (ignoring the years of U.S. involvement in World War II) so the resurgence in sales was not simply a result of Americans being unable to afford cars during an economic crisis.

\(^8\) Riess, *City Games*, 65; Sidney H. Aronson, “The Sociology of the Bicycle” *Social Forces* 30 no. 3 (March, 1952), 312. Aronson writes, “Of course, the automobile, for the most part, displaced the bicycle as a means of transportation, but made full use of the institutions which accompanied the two-wheeled vehicle. See also, Richard Harmond, “Progress and Flight: An Interpretation of the American Cycle Craze of the 1890s” *Journal of Social History* 5, no. 2 (Winter, 1971-72), 251. Harmond argues, “The bicycle, as inventor Hiram P. Maxim pointed out, created a demand which it could no longer satisfy. ‘A mechanically propelled vehicle was wanted instead of a foot-propelled one,’ he wrote, ‘and we now know that the automobile was the answer.’ In this, as in so many other respects, the bicycle had prepared the way for the automobile.”
bicycle was quickly becoming associated with childhood and seen as something adults seldom used and then only for fun—reliving their childhood. Adults who employed bicycles for transportation, or for utilitarian purposes, were either seen as old-fashioned, eccentric, or simply unable to afford other means of transportation. The bicycle industry’s marketing decisions along with rising usage of the automobile worked together to redefine the bicycle in America. These developments were spurred on by Americans’ changing notions of progress and success, both of which were imbedded in the American dream—a pursuit founded on consumption. They were also encouraged by increasing suburbanization.

Suburbanization was good for the sales of children’s bicycles, given the growing concern for safety on public roads, but it was less positive for adult models. Suburban adults were unwilling to use a bicycle to commute to jobs in the city. Not only would their commute be longer, but it would also be rife with the dangers that came in sharing the road with automobiles. All of this resulted in a bicycle industry that was even less active in pursuing the hearts of adult consumers in the 1930s and following decades. This had a detrimental impact on the image of the bicycle, helping it transform from a legitimate means of mobility into an adolescent amusement. A report to President Franklin Roosevelt on behalf of the Bicycle Manufacturers Association, “an incorporated membership society organized in 1910 representing in excess of 87.5% of the known members of Industry and 97% of the volume of production,” called attention to this transformation. Regarding bicycle production, it explained, “From 1923 to 1932 the decline in production, except for 1929, has been consistent. It was during this period that the demand for the bicycle as a means of transportation became secondary to its demand
as a plaything for children.”⁹ American adults were driving cars more and riding bikes less. Children, on the other hand were gaining access to bicycles and approval from parents. While the automobile was integral to the white middle-class adult experience, the bicycle was just as integral to the experience of white middle class children. Both parent and child would think about the bicycle in new ways as the automobile age came into being. This was not a simply result of the emergence of the car, but also the bicycle industry’s reaction to the car.

Cyclists were wary of motorists from the very start and those concerns would give way to outright fear as automobile traffic increased throughout the 1920s and the 1930s. The booming popularity of the automobile changed not only the streets and conceptions of what was safe to do in those streets, but also the landscape. The automobile gave impetus to sprawling American suburbs. American families of the middle and upper classes could move out of the city into suburbs, where they could have their own yards and homes, completely separate from their neighbors.

As the automobile and public transportation increasingly affected the utilitarian portion of the bicycle market, the United States’ cultural divergence from France, Belgium, Germany, England, and other European countries—where the bicycle remained significantly more competitive with automobiles—became more pronounced. In his book on the history of the bicycle, David Herlihy writes, “The number of bicycles circulating in the United States climbed to about two or three million by the mid-1930s, but that figure paled in comparison to the European fleets. Germany, which had half the American population, counted fifteen million bicycles. Great Britain and France each had

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about seven million cycles, followed by Italy with four million. Even the tiny Netherlands had three million: one for almost every other citizen. Every working day, some 40,000 cyclists commuted in and out of Amsterdam alone.”

The sociologist Thomas Burr attempts to answer how this could happen with his comparative study of the bicycle market in France and the U.S. Burr argues, “bicycles lost social legitimacy in the United States and retained it in France” because of the over-production of bicycles in the U.S. in the 1890s. This, he suggests, caused bicycle prices to decrease dramatically and allowed members of lower classes the opportunity to enjoy cycling, which negated the status that bicycle ownership conferred.

An article in the *New York Times* seemed to agree with Burr, arguing, “The bicycle was handicapped by its failure to appeal to snobbishness in those early days of motoring. It was the cheapest means of transportation and had to take the consequences.” The *New York Times* further predicted a revival of the bicycle and contradictorily argued that both the reduction in price of bicycles, as well as encouraging the wealthy to take up bicycle riding, would cure waning sales—the sentiment being that in order for the bicycle to survive it would need to appeal to all classes. Others believed that simply getting the middle and upper class on bicycles was good enough. The President of the Cycle Tradesmen of Dayton said, “[W]hat a curiosity it would be to see our socially prominent men and women riding the two-wheeled vehicles.” Were this to occur, they assumed the lower-class would also buy bicycles, as they sought to mimic the social elites. In 1922, however, bicycle manufacturers did indeed reduce the retail price

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of bikes by 40%. While it may have temporarily increased sales, it did not bring the bicycle back into vogue.\textsuperscript{14} What the industry really wanted, after all, was not another cycling fad that would play out in a matter of years; it wanted a sustained growth in sales. The price reduction was yet another failed attempt at attracting adult consumers, which would influence the industry’s continued move toward younger consumers.

Thomas Burr points to the impact of automobile production suggesting that the automotive industry created two distinctive markets in France and the U.S. He argues, “Leisure use [of bicycles] collapsed in the United States, but adjusted itself to a new class of riders in France and continued to be a major factor in the market.”\textsuperscript{15} He contends that another reason for the bicycle’s continued success in France was because it was substantially more difficult to procure and maintain an automobile there than it was in the U.S. He suggests this was due, in part, to “political factors” such as strict driving tests, the early establishment of license requirements, and heavy taxes on gasoline.\textsuperscript{16} Frank Bowden, head of the Raleigh Cycle Company echoed the sentiment writing, “‘It is remarkable that with a population of 110 millions, the output of [American] bicycles is not greater than in England.’ He attributed the weak demand to the ‘astounding’ prominence of the increasingly affordable American automobile. ‘Everyone’s Ambition in the States,’ he concluded, ‘seems to be to have a motorcar.’”\textsuperscript{17} While bicycling was less popular than it was in Europe, even by the late 1930s bicycle merchants were convinced that rising sales meant the American automotive boom had ended. As a result,

\textsuperscript{15} Burr. \textit{Markets As Producers and Consumers}, 315. Burr gives much of the credit to the automobile suggesting that it "led to the development of two very different markets at the end of the decade. The two national elites exited the market, and working-class riders entered the market in large numbers, but the middle classes in each country took very different paths, and since the markets were, at this time, predominantly middle-class, this led to different markets."
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 338.
\textsuperscript{17} Herlihy, \textit{Bicycle}, 325.
adults were coming back to the bike. Leisure usage of the bicycle did not collapse—as Burr suggests—so much as it sputtered out of fashion among adults, with a fast and fleeting increase in cycling beginning around 1936. Otherwise, leisure use continued to transform as the bicycle industry catered to, and therefore made their product emblematic of, youth.

An ex-amateur racer from the U.S., Hans Ohrt, called attention to the trends in American bicycle design in comparison to those of France. Ohrt claimed that France led the world in bicycle manufacturing, even in spite of the fact that it was also a world leader in automobile usage, simply because it had remained optimistic in bicycle production. To say France was a “world leader” in automobile usage is vague and somewhat misleading. In 1920, it was still behind the United Kingdom and well behind the United States when it came to the number of inhabitants per registered passenger vehicle. Although France would surpass the United Kingdom by 1930, it appears they never surpassed the United States. Regardless of whether France led the world in automobile usage, Ohrt’s claim about dwindling bicycle sales in the U.S. is worth considering. Contrary to Burr’s insinuation that bicycles continued to do well, in part, because cars were harder to procure and license in France, Ohrt believed problems with bicycle sales in the U.S. were entirely unconnected to automobile sales. He argued that the reason why “thousands of bicycles are used by all classes . . . old men and women as

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19 Kenneth T. Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 163. According to table 9-2: In 1920, the U.S. led with one passenger vehicle for every 13 inhabitants, while it was one for every 228 in the U.K. and one for every 247 in France. In 1930, there was one car for every 5 inhabitants in the U.S., one for every 37 in France, and one for every 42 in the U.K.
well as boys and girls,” in France was a matter of design. In comparison to American bicycles, he explained, European models were more desirable in France because they minimized “unnecessary weight.”

Three years later, an article in the same magazine informed readers, “Bicycles enjoy far greater popularity in the European countries than they do in the United States.” This was especially true in the cities where Germans workers were much more likely to use bicycles as transportation than Americans. In spite of the fact that the number adults commuting via bicycle had supposedly been significantly impacted by cheaper public transit options, Germany still “ha[d] about ten million bicycle riders, both male and female and of all ages.” The article focused on the problems that arose out of the growing congestion in the city streets, especially when it led to automobiles, public transit, and bicycles all fighting to ensure their right of way. This led to a need for city officials and city planners to take more caution to “regulate traffic conditions and to design streets and roads in such a way, that the bicycle rider will find it a safe and pleasure to ride his bicycle and that he will not obstruct the traffic.” It was clear that the bicycle’s lack of speed was becoming a major issue for the growing number of cars on the road. His comments show that motorists were annoyed with cyclists who were in their way. Even public transportation officials seemed to express dissatisfaction with cyclists occupying their stops. It also shows these problems were not unique to the United States. Still, the bicycle remained popular elsewhere. The decline in bicycle

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21 Ibid.
22 “Bicycles Big Transportation Factor in Germany,” Motorcycling (Including the Bicycling World), March 14, 1928, 29.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
consumption among American adults suggests that American cyclists were, at least momentarily, more willing to give up their right to the road than to take a chance of insult or injury while riding a bicycle. Members of the bicycle industry continued to consider why this was the case.

Bicycle sales averaged around 585,000 per year from 1916 to 1920 but the average number of sales for the next thirteen years was around 288,000.\(^{25}\) Aware that sales were well below expectations, members of the bicycle industry set to work trying to figure out the precise cause of the slump and a means to overcome it. In 1925, *Motorcycling (Including the Bicycling World)* surveyed bicycle dealers on how to improve their sales. The magazine then published a selection of the responses it received in July, but prefaced those with the statement, “Before analyzing the replies, however, it behooves us to state that the number of replies to the questionnaire seem to indicate that bicycle dealers as a class are not very articulate.”\(^{26}\) Still, it claimed the “replies represent a fair cross-section of the trade from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific, and from Maine to the Gulf of Mexico, covering 12 states and as such are of some value as an indication of the trend of dealer thought.”\(^{27}\) Regarding obstacles to bicycle sales, among various concerns, dealers listed automobile traffic (particularly Fords), lack of a set price, mail order businesses and department stores, lack of publicity, and hard times.\(^{28}\) According to the report, most dealers believed “aggressive action” needed to be taken to cure the ailments of the retail bicycle business. Specifically, dealers recommended,

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\(^{25}\) “U.S. Bicycle Market Statistics-1895 to 1979” *Schwinn Reporter*, March 1980. The only outlier to this trend was 1923, when consumption was estimated at 525,000. This is based on census data for “apparent consumption” which is the number of bicycles produced in the U.S. per year plus imports minus exports. The stock market crash of 1929 had a relatively small effect on sales in the years to follow, during the Great Depression.

\(^{26}\) “Dealers Tell What Ails Bicycle,” *Motorcycling (Including the Bicycling World)*, July 22, 1925, 40.

\(^{27}\) Ibid.

\(^{28}\) Ibid.
Take action to put the bicycle before the people, to make them see the economy of bicycles as compared to automobiles . . . show the customer that it pays to ride a bicycle . . . the bicycle will be used more; people are finding out that they can’t afford cars; notice more men riding bicycles lately . . . more national advertising . . . as long as cheap second-hand cars can be sold on easy terms to folks who cannot afford them, these same cannot and will not buy bicycles . . . [and] raise funds to repeal the Volstead Law that caused hard times.²⁹

Most of the responses sought relief through advertising and publicity but the type of advertising called for was varied. While some called for advertising that was general in nature—playing on the benefits of using a bicycle—others believed the advertising should target the automobile directly by talking about the advantages of bicycles over cars. The one reply concerning the Volstead Act was prefaced as “very original” but what the respondent, A.L. Deninger, was talking about in general terms was the economy. He believed it was simply hard-times that caused the bicycle business to suffer. At another point in the survey Deninger expounded on his point about the Volstead Act writing, “The dry law keeps 200,000,000 (?) men out of employment. This alone ruins our business.”³⁰ The editor included the question mark because the number quoted surpassed the total U.S. population at the time, another, subtler, reminder that the dealers had no clue. In fact, the piece made an effort to show that dealers were all over the board when it came to stimulating sales. What is curious about the returned surveys is that many of the merchants who responded were apparently concerned with adult consumers. None of the responses directly mentioned a need to do more to entice children, nor did they explicitly address concerns about safety.

In spite of that, addressing safety issues and continuing a pattern of increased marketing to children was precisely the direction the bicycle industry would take over the

²⁹ Ibid.
³⁰ Ibid.
next few years. There was an apparent disconnect between industry elites and retailers. The claim that dealers were inarticulate highlights some condescension and mistrust of merchants’ opinions. To be sure, industry leaders were concerned with the loss of sales to American adults but their solutions were somewhat varied and often overly ambitious, or flat out delusional. In 1925, it was hard to predict the continued growth of automobile sales but many of the changes that would make the car such an important part of life in America were already underway. While some wondered what ailed the bicycle retail business, others were more specific in addressing the issue of why adults were abandoning the bicycle.

In the Cycling Notes and Comment section of *Bicycling World*, one of the industry leaders, W.T. Farwell, asked, “Well, Why Don’t they?” Entertaining the question of why more adults did not ride bicycles, his answer was, “fear.” He argued that grown-ups were consumed by a “Fear of traffic, fear of what the neighbors will say, and fear of a little leg work.” Farwell described America as a nation of “automobile riders” explaining, “Everybody—almost owns a car, and to ride a bicycle is considered out of date. It’s all right for the kids, but just a’ bit beneath the dignity of the kids’ parents.” His comment made implications about the changing gender, age, and class ideals embodied in the bicycle. By the 1920s, in light of the growing popularity of automobiles, the bicycle was not the first choice for the purposes of conspicuous consumption nor was it the most popular way to display gendered ideals of manhood and womanhood. Farwell argued that to continue riding a bicycle was seen as holding on to relics of the past. Accordingly, the car was attractive, in part, because it provided an opportunity to

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32 Ibid.
demonstrate financial means and modernity, just as the bicycle once had in the 1870s-80s.  

The growing number of cars on the road arising out of changing patterns of consumption led to proliferating traffic problems, particularly on the city streets. In their booklet, *Cycle-Logical Ways to Happier Days*, the Cycle Trades of America (CTA) suggested that the growing automobile culture was bad for manhood. A physician, Dr. E. Parker Sanborn said, “It wouldn’t hurt the daddies a bit to take regular exercise on a bike. Riding so much in automobiles is responsible for soft, flabby muscles, sluggish circulation and a lot of things cycling chases out of a man.” 

Farwell, a field representative for the C.T.A., suggested that the growing popularity of cars was detrimental to even those who preferred riding a bicycle. As America entered the age of automobiles, the bicycle industry was forced into a defensive position—faced with the task of proving that their product was not dangerous. Farwell argued, “The dangers of riding a bicycle are more apparent than real. With ordinary care—watching traffic signals and keeping close to the edge of the street or road—the cyclist is just as safe as any other road user.” Obviously, this is an embellishment since the contest between two cars in an accident was quite different than that of a car against a bicyclist—family cars could weigh well over 2,700 pounds and travel over 70 miles per hour. Farwell’s intended point, that you have just as much chance being struck by a motorist whether you

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were walking, cycling, or driving was unlikely to console cyclists since they would have understood the disadvantages of the physics in a car versus bicycle scenario. His point that adults were not riding bicycles as much in the 1920s due to fear, however, is more credible. At a time when bicycle-related accidents had risen, with over 500 fatalities and 14,000 injuries per year, bicycle ads and promotions paid keen attention to bicycle safety.\(^{37}\)

Whether the bicycle was less safe, given the increasing amount of automobiles on the road, was indeed important for the bicycle industry to consider. Not only did it need to give attention to issues of safety in advertisements, but it would also take safety into consideration when designing and producing bicycles. At the same time, if the public could not be convinced that the bicycle was safe, in light of automobiles, the industry could focus instead on models that were not necessarily designed for commuting, such as children’s bicycles and leisure models. These models were relatively heavy and inefficient yet stylish and ornamental in design. Conveniently for the bicycle industry, rising suburbanization in America provided an arguably safer environment for children to ride their bicycles—among their own neighborhood streets.

A columnist for the *New York Times* echoed these fears and suggested that cycling was less popular because of the increasing danger of riding a bicycle on public roads. "In the United States, with its 20,000,000 motor vehicles, bicycle riding has become too dangerous to be indulged in as a recreation. There was not better exercise in its prime. . . . A great sport went out in the United States when cycling was

\(^{37}\) Smith, *A Social History of the Bicycle*, 247. Smith does not include the number of bicycle accidents and fatalities for previous years. He simply says the number “climbed.”
abandoned." While it is clear that cycling was not completely abandoned at the time this article was written, it had most definitely experienced a great loss in popularity. In spite of dwindling numbers, cycling for leisure and sport both survived. Even by 1924, six-day races were still able to set attendance records. A race at Madison Square Garden in December 1924 made headlines for drawing over 80,000 spectators with more than $200,000 in gate receipts—promoters were expected to have made nearly $150,000 in profit.

If some gave up the bicycle due to fear, others sought solutions. In larger cities, cyclists called on public officials to support the development of cycling paths. In some instances, those petitioning for bicycle paths tied their demands to ideals of patriotism and paternalism, claiming that cycling paths were important for youth. A bicycle dealer in Kenosha, Wisconsin teamed up with a local bicycle racing legend to go before the city council where they “convinced them that in order to preserve our future democratic and republican possibilities—the younger generation of today, it was going to be necessary to set aside a tract of land for them to ride their bicycles on in safety . . . instead of in the streets which are becoming more crowded daily with insipid motorists who have no regard for life or limb.” According to the article, “the city agreed to set aside a plot and to assist in every manner possible, the planning and constructing of an oval, to be used exclusively by the bike riders.” The track was popular among the boys and girls of the community with over 9,000 people showing up for the grand opening, many of them the fathers and mothers “who crowded the natural amphitheater that they might see and cheer

41 Ibid.
their boy or girl to victory.”

This story was included in a cycling trade magazine as impetus for bicycle dealers to be more proactive in their communities. The author excoriated the “dealers who claim that the game is not what it used to be, that it is dying out, and that no one is interested in bicycles since second-hand Fords are so cheap.”

Many dealers believed the future of the bicycle was bleak, precisely why there was plenty of encouragement in the pages of trade magazines.

Industry leaders continued their efforts to combat the growing belief that bicycling on the streets was unsafe, particularly for children. Ultimately, they had to convince the public, but that could only occur after first convincing merchants.

Throughout the next few issues of *Motorcycling (Including the Bicycling World)* T.J. Sullivan, the editor and member of the CTA would publish several articles stressing the burden on merchants to reassure concerned parents and to disprove the common misconception that the bicycle was unsafe. Sullivan said, “bicycle dealers, themselves, are the worst offenders in spreading the ‘dangerous’ bicycle propaganda. They have heard so much about bicycles being unsafe for children to ride in the public streets that they have come to believe it.”

As this was a trade magazine and a big portion of Sullivan’s audience was the very merchants he was scolding, he implored dealers to check the facts. He claimed, “If they did, they would be able to convince themselves first, and then the public, that the hue and cry about bicycles being unsafe to ride is based absolutely on pure imagination.”

He also believed they would find that many of the kids who were killed by automobiles died while running out into the street for various

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42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
reasons, not riding a bicycle. He cited Chicago coroner records, which “show that not more than two or three in any year were killed or injured while riding bicycles. Playing baseball or football or tag in the streets, roller-skating, or merely running from behind one vehicle into the path of another going in the opposite direction” was what actually caused automobiles to accidentally kill children. This information was provided so that bicycle dealers might combat the misconception that bicycles were dangerous. It also gave them an argument to make when trying to convince parents to buy their kids a bicycle, rather than a football, baseball equipment, or roller skates. Sullivan even went so far as to claim the bicycle was safer than shoes, however, this article was written for bicycle dealers and other members of the industry, not the general public, so this level of bias was unsurprising. The articles he published subsequently would employ the same line of reasoning.

One such article sought to persuade merchants that motorists were the real problem. It suggested,

Children with bicycles are not forced to play in the streets. The bicycle transports them quickly and safely to protected enclosures where they are safe from the careless motor moron. And on their bicycles while going to and from the parks and playgrounds they are safer than afoot. Every automobile driver is on the alert when he sees a boy or a girl on a bicycle ahead of him. It is easier for the car driver to avoid the cyclist for the reason that the boy or girl awheel is not so likely to make sudden swerves into the path of the machine as the boy or girl afoot is. Besides, the bicycle rider is more visible than a boy or girl afoot.

Sullivan went so far as to make the argument that dealers were actually ensuring children’s safety when they sold them bicycles. Otherwise, the child might walk to the park or playground, whereas on their bicycle they would be much more visible and safe.

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46 Ibid.
47 “Bicycles Take Kids Off the Streets,” Motorcycling (Including the Bicycling World), May 27, 1925, 35.
It boldly proclaimed, “The only safety precaution to avoid the ‘slaughter of the innocents’ is to provide them with some means of transportation between their homes and the public parks and playgrounds, and what is so ideal for this as the bicycle?” This was a point that would hopefully inspire merchants but at the same time, a point that merchants could disseminate to the public when making appeals to children’s parents.

This sentiment was reiterated by Sullivan in an article that blamed decreased sales solely on misconceptions about safety. He wrote, “Bicycle dealers, you have been on the defensive too long in the poison gas attack upon your business through the insidious propaganda that children on bicycles are in danger when using the public street and highways. That poison gas is not only entering the homes where your best customers, children from 8 to 16 years live, but also in your shops where you have ‘dug in’ while it is destroying your salesmanship and gradually asphyxiating your business.” He reassured dealers, “The facts of the situation are that more children have been killed by the lack of bicycles than by those using them.” The article included excerpted stories from the Chicago Tribune of children who had been killed by automobiles while playing in the street. Sullivan contended that the kids would not have died if they had bicycles because they would have been playing at a public park or playground instead of in the street. He concluded the article writing, “Ask parents ‘CAN YOU AFFORD TO RISK YOUR CHILDREN’S LIVES BY DENYING THEM BICYCLES?’”

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48 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
51 T.J. Sullivan was also most likely the author of the article from the previous month “Bicycles Take Kids off the Streets” in which an author’s name was not provided but Sullivan was an editor and contributor to the magazine.
52 Ibid.
kids. Rather than deny they were a threat, he insisted they were, but that the bicycle was the best way to make things safer. In this slight twist of description, the automobile became the negative and the bicycle the positive.

Other concerns about the safety of cycling manifested in calls for bicycle paths and tracks that were located safely away from automobile traffic. These calls did not come solely from enterprising bicycle dealers, however, there were many “cyclists . . . urging more cycle paths.” By 1938, this had snowballed into what was described as countless “groups, organizations and individuals . . . clamoring and petitioning for bicycle tracks, exclusive lanes marked off” and so on.53 Fairfax Downey noted ironically, “The bicycle was on the other end of the controversy in 1899, when the buggy interest brought suit to have those horse-scaring bikes ruled off the road. But the Supreme Court was moved to declare that the bicycle was a vehicle and as such had the same rights as other vehicles.”54 It is true that bicycles faced legal action from the horse and buggy riders of the 1890s, but in that instance, cyclists had to fight a legal battle for their right to the road. By the 1920s, rather than trying to get automobiles outlawed from the public streets—the action carriage drivers took against cyclists—bicycle proponents were more interested in the creation of their own paths. Their predecessors successfully advocated for safer and smoother roads as early as the 1880s with the good roads movement led by the League of American Wheelmen.55 Whereas early efforts were more concerned that roads be navigable, the bigger battle, beginning in the 1920s, focused on safe access to the roads or newly constructed paths separate from streets and automobiles.

In a twist of fate, advocates now feared being crowded out of the smooth surfaces their predecessors worked so hard to create.

The CTA downplayed the safety concerns all together. Instead, it instructed their two touring bicycle advocates—whose primary job was to visit schools and talk to children about bicycles—to refrain from talking about safety issues for fear that it would become the focus of the conversation. In a similar manner, merchants were instructed to limit discussions about safety to private conversations with children’s parents. It was not an ideal point to highlight in advertisements and marketing. Still, some companies did allude to safety issues in their advertisements, but only in a general sense. This was most apparent in the advertisements for coaster brakes, tires, and rims. The Lobdell-Emery Manufacturing Company, for instance, ran an advertisement for their chromium plated bike rims that said, “More riding miles of comfort, safety and speedy performance boys!” Tire and brake manufacturers were also sure to mention that their products could add to the safety of the bicycle by helping riders stop more quickly. Dealers played up these safety features as well. T.J. Sullivan publicly applauded “one wise dealer” who reportedly sold “upward of 800 bicycles a year use[ing] the coaster-brake as an argument for convincing parents that bicycles are safer than walking.” He told parents, “Now look at this bicycle. You see this brake? Notice how quick the bicycle stops by pressing back on the pedal. Much quicker than a child can stop when running.” Manufacturers also made connections between the advancements in their product and the automobile industry. The New Departure Company promoted their brakes in Boys’ Life magazine

56 “Bicycles Take Kids Off the Streets,” Motorcycling (Including the Bicycling World), May 27, 1925, 35.
59 Ibid.
proclaiming, “And that New Departure coaster brake, Boy! How smooth it works. Has 24 braking surfaces on the multiple discs—works just like Dad’s automobile clutch. It sure is a dandy. You should get one laced into your bicycle—any dealer can do it for you, and it doesn’t cost much.”

While the trade magazines and industry leaders focused on the issue of bicycle safety regarding children, merchants and adult cyclists advocated for safer conditions for grown-ups. Much like the survey sent out to dealers in which their concerns about the adult market were largely ignored, merchant’s ideas and goals differed from those advocated by trade magazines, industry leaders, and manufacturers—who were more interested in children. If there was any debate to be had, things would certainly fall in the direction of industry leaders and manufacturers who had more power over production, design, and many organizations that might lobby in favor of bicycles. In looking to their future, however, both sides could agree that the growing number of cars on the road was not the only factor affecting consumption of the bicycle. As the United States’ population continued to grow and consumption of vehicles shifted, so did residential patterns.

An article in the New York Times predicting the bicycle's comeback explained that one of the reasons for the recovery of bicycle sales from the abysmal numbers in 1921 and 1922 was the increasing prevalence of suburban living. Retailers believed that suburban life—made possible by the automobile—created an environment in which

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“children [could] use bicycles with safety.”62 The headline for the article boldly claimed, “Youth Exhausts Thrill of Auto and Roller Skate and Goes in for the Old-Time Fun of Pedaling.”63 General Motors Vice President and committee member of the CTA, De Witt Page, told crowds at the convention of cycle trades in Atlantic City, “The automobile . . . has made possible the development of suburban life, and in the suburbs children can use bicycles with safety.”64 Conversely, suburbanization had adverse effects for bicycle usage among adults since it complicated commuting to work. Still, there was a way for the bicycle industry to try to make a positive out of this cultural development that was beyond their control.

Bicycle boosters promoted their product by proclaiming, “Bicycles Take Children off the Streets.” Along with making a point about how children’s bicycles increased safety, the article also made some implications about the virtues of suburbanization and the dangers of big cities. It argued that children killed by automobiles were usually from “big apartment house districts [who] are forced to use the streets” because there was no neighborhood playground or park. The bicycle was of value because it would make playgrounds and parks, which may be some distance from the child’s home, more accessible.65 As much as a statement about the safety of bicycles in the city, this perspective also offers insights into the way in which class affected consumption of the bicycle. For the children who grew up in these “big apartment house districts” a bicycle was not as likely of a gift to be found under the Christmas tree as it was for children growing up in the suburbs. Not only would the bicycle be a relatively expensive item for

63 Ibid.
64 Ibid. De Witt Page was undoubtedly a member of the Cycle Trades of America as a representative of New Departure, a subsidiary of GM that made coaster brakes and bearings used on bicycles.
65 “Bicycles Take Kids Off the Streets,” Motorcycling (Including the Bicycling World), May 27, 1925, 35.
parents of the lower class to buy, but in the cases that they may also be living in urban apartment complexes, the bicycle would also be impractical. This was especially true if the complex did not provide bike racks.

Dealers certainly noticed the important opportunity that growing suburbs created. Howard Jefferis, a bicycle dealer in Louisville, Kentucky, who had been in the business for 38 years, made the decision in 1928 to move from his downtown location to the suburbs. Recounting his decision, the story told merchants, “Mr. Jefferis advises the bicycle dealer to pull up stakes and push into the suburban territory, where the bicycles are and where he will be in a good position to secure more new sales and get the servicing of the bicycles that he does sell.”66 This was not about selling bicycles to adults. Rather, it focused on the issue of safety and the fact that many of the children who had bicycles were living in the suburbs. The middle-class parents of those children were likely to own cars and be of a white collar status. This demographic was attractive because it was economically stable, a crucial trait for bicycle boosters. Jefferis said so himself, admitting that he moved his shop to the Highlands area of Louisville, which was only a few miles from downtown, in part, because it was known as a “wealthy section, where there are fine boulevards for fast traveling autos, and a lot of quite streets, a big park, etc.”67 It was not just Jefferis, however, that was making this move to accommodate his business to the changing times and conditions. Other bicycles merchants, such as R.L. Davis, Kline Motorcycle Company, and Indian Motorcycle Sales

67 Ibid.
& Service Company, had also recently “pulled up stakes” and gotten out of the congested downtown area.⁶₈

Jefferis was clear when it came to the impact of the automobile on bicycle business saying, “Dealers have long been too mealy-mouthed in refusing to publicly or otherwise discuss the fact that the automobile has driven the bicycle from the downtown streets. The only people riding bicycles on downtown streets are a few messenger boys.”⁶⁹ Those messenger boys would have been closer to adulthood and using the bicycle for income. And, as he said, they were few in numbers, less common than suburban children.

In making claims that youth had exhausted the thrill of automobiles, members of the bicycle trade suggested that the automobile was just a fad that would soon fall out of fashion, just as the bicycle had done in 1898.⁷⁰ It is important to note that this was written in 1925, a year in which “automobile manufacturing slowed its prodigious rate of growth.”⁷¹ In 1926, even a spokesman for General Motors was somewhat pessimistic stating publicly, “It seems altogether unlikely that tremendous annual increases will continue.”⁷² The collective memory of the bicycle industry was also at play. Its experiences with adult consumers in the 1890s inspired pessimism about the prospect of sustaining sales to adults for more than a few years at a time, regardless of the product. This was coupled with a belief that if the youth were growing bored of the car in 1925 adults would soon follow. The implication was that even adults would come back to the bicycle after their affair with the automobile. Still, the bicycle industry hedged their bets

⁶⁸ Ibid. At the time, motorcycles and bicycles were often manufactured and sold by the same business.
⁶⁹ Ibid.
⁷¹ Kennedy, Freedom From Fear, 34-35.
⁷² Albert Bradley, “Setting up a Forecasting Program,” Annual Convention Series, American Management Association, no. 41 (March 1926), quoted in Kennedy, Freedom From Fear, 22.
by putting their focus on the juvenile market instead of gearing up for increased sales as adults came back to the bicycle. The belief that American youth would reject the automobile was, no doubt, wishful thinking on the part of bicycle industry officials. Whether they rejected cars or not, the fact that statutory law prohibited children from driving cars certainly worked in the bicycle industry’s favor. Even so, manufacturers decided to mimic many design characteristics of motorized vehicles. This suggests that, at least in their opinion, children were indeed fascinated by cars.

The 1920s had been decidedly bleak for the bicycle industry but the 1930s would offer some promise. By 1934, the industry was beginning to experience an upturn, one that was forecasted as early as 1930. An advertisement for the New Departure coaster brake exclaimed, "HAPPY DAYS ARE HERE AGAIN! Glorious days for the kiddies – profitable days for cycle dealers. Cycle Trades advertising in the Post, American Boy, and in comics is peppin' up the industry to greater sales efforts and we confidently look for bigger business this year."\(^{73}\) The exclamation, “Happy Days are here again” was no doubt a comment on the state of the bicycle industry and possibly a sign of optimism regarding the entire economy. The uptick in sales four years later would indeed coincide with a decline in unemployment. Bicycle consumption rose from 323,000 in 1933 to 518,000 in 1934 whereas unemployment fell from 25 percent in 1933 to 22 percent in 1934.\(^{74}\) The connections between trends in unemployment and bicycle sales were not all that synchronous, however, when looking at the depression as a whole. As table 5.1 shows, bicycle sales could thrive in spite of unemployment levels. In fact, bicycles were doing so well that *Motorcycle and Bicycle Illustrated* underwent a significant alteration

by changing its name to *American Bicyclist and Motorcyclist*. The new found importance of the bicycle was signified by a change in the order of the title of the magazine, as well as the font—making bicycles the dominant subject. The content of the magazine also became substantially more devoted to the bicycle, while motorcycling content became significantly less common.

Individuals within the bicycle industry were encouraged by the upswing in business, even if they were confused, or divided, on what exactly caused the revival. The number of bicycles sold versus the number of passenger cars registered during the first few years of the Great Depression shows that rebounding bicycle sales were not simply a function of fewer cars being sold. In fact, the trends in bicycles sold and cars registered show similarities. While the numbers are quite a bit different, when bicycle sales experienced the biggest gains so too did the number of cars registered. The number of bicycles sold, however, was less affected by drastic increases in unemployment than cars registered. Still, the upswing that the bicycle industry began experiencing in 1933 was shared by the automotive industry one year later. Census data shows that many items among “personal consumption expenditures” were bouncing back by 1934, including food & tobacco, clothing, and recreation. The bicycle, however, was doing more than bouncing back; it was surpassing pre-Depression sales figures.

Unemployment, Bicycles Sold, and Cars Registered, 1929-1937

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1929</th>
<th>1930</th>
<th>1931</th>
<th>1932</th>
<th>1933</th>
<th>1934</th>
<th>1935</th>
<th>1936</th>
<th>1937</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
<td>24.9%</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>20.1%</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
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At its annual meeting in 1933, the CTA attributed the growth, at least in part, to a rise in the fashionability of cycling. CTA president, W.B. Stephenson said, “We can credit women with the fact that bicycle sales for the first three weeks of August were 295 percent of those in the entire month of August last year.” More specifically, the Chicago Daily Tribune attributed the revival of the tandem bicycle “to the recent fashion of bicycling established among women.” This line of reasoning was similar to the logic of the 1910s. At that time, members of the cycling industry proposed that if the interest of society women was awoken and maintained, cycling would grow in popularity. Such appeals confirm what historian Alan Brinkley argues “was the increasing appeal, even the vice grip, of conformity in many areas of society” during the Great Depression. Connecting bicycle marketing to fashion, however, was short-sighted since fashions, by their very nature, are not permanent. Regardless of the CTA’s understanding or clear articulation of the forces that were positively affecting bicycle sales beginning in 1933, sales would continue to rise until World War II.

The steady rise of bicycle sales starting in 1933, along with the persistent advocacy of groups, organizations, and individuals put pressure on governmental officials

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77 Ibid.
78 Alan Brinkley, Culture and Politics in the Great Depression (Waco: Markham Press Fund, 1999), 11-12. He offers Dale Carnegie’s bestseller How to Win Friends and Influence People, “a paean to the positive value of conformity,” as evidence.
and city planners to think more seriously about cyclists—even when it was done out of a need to get them out of the way. The total U.S. market “apparent consumption” (purchases) of bicycles rose from 323,967 in 1933 to over 1.1 million in 1936 and 1937.80 Throughout the 1920s, the industry was only able to break the 400,000 mark in 1923. Its ability to sell over one million bicycles in 1936 and 1937 bolstered opinions that “the marked rise in enthusiasm and growing interest in bicycling on the part of the general public within the city limits” required park executives to study cycling needs and plan facilities.81 This was the first time since 1900 that the industry had been able to meet the one million mark.

By 1938, even Robert Moses—“the world’s most vocal, effective, and prestigious apologist for the automobile”—responded to the revival by creating safe spaces for bicycles in New York City.82 In his proposal for bicycle paths, he told Mayor La Guardia,

When on July 9th as one of those participating in the ceremonies in connection with the opening of a two and one half mile section of the outmoded Motor Parkway in Queens, into an experimental bicycle path from which data to satisfy the demands of bicycle traffic will be obtained, I said – ‘The way to make progress, sometimes, is to go backward,’ and that the Park Department was planning more than fifty miles of additional paths exclusively for bicyclists throughout the five boroughs, which would turn the calendar back forty years...83

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In writing, “The way to make progress, sometimes, is to go backward,” progress meant unrestrained automobility and cyclists taking up part of the street represented regress, an obstacle to progress that needed a remedy. Mayor La Guardia was of a similar opinion when it came to alternatives to cars. He believed “the automobile represented the best of modern civilization while the trolley was simply an old-fashioned obstacle to progress.”

Robert Moses made it clear that the number of children on bicycles had become significant enough to cause city planners to consider young cyclists. In fact, a primary purpose of the proposal was to help get kids off the public streets. But his purpose was two-fold, partially so that children could avoid injury, but also to remove a “hazard to motorists.” He contradicted T.J. Sullivan’s arguments that children were safer on bicycles writing, “Every motorist is aware of the hazard created by children of the adolescent age exploring the whole width of the roadway, and particularly by delivery boys who weave in and out of traffic or steal a tow on the rear of fast-moving vehicles and trolley cars.” He continued by suggesting that relegating cyclists to sidewalks was not a viable solution since, in that instance, they would pose just as much of a threat to pedestrians. Clearly, Sullivan and Moses were in conflict about the problem but agreement about the solution. Moses’ description of the problem, however, was one that could attract more support from motorists and the automotive industry, which was important considering the number of motorists on the roads as opposed to the number of cyclists.

The New York Times confirmed Moses’ points about the resurgence of the bicycle. Described as a “bicycle army,” Marshall Sprague informed readers, “In the past

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84 Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier, 170.
two years, domestic bicycle production has quadrupled. . . . The country’s cycle population is said to have reached 6,000,000, far more than existed in the Gay Nineties."86 The article included five separate photos of men and women—not children—and their bicycles. Two of the pictures were throwbacks to the days of old, one showing a woman getting started on a boneshaker and the other pictured a man standing next to his ordinary. Sprague contended, “As a cycling nation, we are creeping up on England, France and Germany.”87 He offered the fact there were “110 youth hostels, rustic inns placed at convenient intervals along popular cycling and hiking trails, where cyclists can get food and lodging . . .” as proof.88 Sprague pointed out that the bicycle was even popular in “motor-minded” cities like Detroit and Chicago. The rest of the article focused on New York City and the initiative to build more cycling paths spearheaded by Robert Moses and the Department of Parks. In the city, he pointed to the popularity of amateur racing and the growing clarity in which cycling clubs articulated their demands—“bombard[ing] Commissioner Robert Moses and his Park Department with appeals and suggestions for cycling facilities.”89

Aside from record sales, the bicycle industry had another factor in its favor. The proposed cycling facilities were a part of the Works Progress Administration’s sponsorship of recreation and attempt at economic recovery. The improvements were to be constructed with “relief labor” all paths to “be surfaced with permanent materials so as to require as little maintenance as possible when practical. . . .”90 While a primary goal of the proposed project was to ensure the safety of cyclists and remove hazards from the

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87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
road for motorists, there was also considerable effort in designing paths that would not be
monotonous for cyclists. Moses wanted the project to provide an opportunity for “mental
relaxation and physical exercise.”91 Because the overwhelming majority of the mileage
created would exist within city parks, the plans were not intent on providing a means for
travel throughout the city. Instead of focusing on making cyclists’ commute safer or
more efficient, they sought to improve the psyche and physical health of New York City
residents. For years, the bicycle industry promoted the bicycle as a means of
rejuvenating the spirit and improving the health of participants. During the Great
Depression, the Works Progress Administration saw the importance of creating facilities
for leisure activities and thereby advocating, in part, on cycling’s behalf. Just as
governmental support and subsidies would prove crucial for the automotive industry over
the next few decades, the bicycle industry too flourished when supported by
congressional funding via federal agency.92

Believing leisure to be just “as pivotal to the social and political recovery of the
nation” as getting people back to work, the New Deal government had an unprecedented
level of interest in Americans’ leisure activities.93 Susan Currell’s study of leisure during
the Great Depression argues, “although the function of the New Deal government was to
get America working again, many of the social programs that took place throughout the
decade focused intently on providing the ‘right’ leisure and correcting the ‘wrong’ leisure
that had emerged.”94 In particular, newer forms of leisure that required passive
participation were viewed with the most contempt. “In 1931, Harold Rugg, author of An

91 Ibid.
92 Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier, 157-171. Jackson makes a convincing argument that public transportation
lost out to the automobile because national transportation policy subsidized air and automobile traffic while
taxing railroads.
93 Currell, The March of Spare Time, 2.
94 Ibid., 3.
Introduction to Problems of American Culture, listed as ‘problematic’ those recreations of modern American culture that entailed alterations in traditional customs: automobile driving, movie going, radio listening, jazz dancing, and spectacle sports..." Currell argues that the New Deal government looked to European models for inspiration, including Italy, Germany, the Soviet Union and Britain. While she suggests that the U.S. wanted to correct and therefore control Americans’ leisure activities, she sets the U.S. apart by showing how it ensured there was still an element of choice. Therefore, WPA projects “attempted to diffuse accusations of government interference in community leisure and to create a ‘grassroots’ approach to the national problem.” New Deal efforts to correct its citizens’ use of free time, which was much more significant during the Depression than it had been previously, purposefully avoided a heavy-handed approach. Historian Foster Rhea Dulles argues that “Despite the demands made for a great measure of control over popular amusements, the American people continued in the 1930s to maintain the laissez-faire attitude which was felt to be the essences of democracy. . . . Opportunity, not compulsion symbolized the American way.” There was a belief that if people were given opportunity for appropriate forms of leisure they would take advantage, as long as there was also an effort to limit access to “undesirable diversions.”

With the help of one quarter of a million New York City residents on the WPA payroll, the New York Department of Parks’ plan called for over 50 miles of bicycle paths in 21 different locations across the five boroughs, most notably with more than five

95 Ibid., 4.
96 Ibid., 55.
98 Currell, The March of Spare Time, 56.
miles planned for Central Park—a constant venue for cycling activities from the 1890s to the present era.\textsuperscript{99} Outside of New York, the WPA also helped construct a velodrome for amateur racing in Chicago and a bicycle track at the Butler Fieldhouse in Indianapolis.\textsuperscript{100} These facilities for bicycle racing, as well as the races themselves, gave the bicycle industry a lot of good publicity. In county fairs, cycling events were included to draw the interest of the locals. One newspaper headline proclaimed, “Approximately Twenty Thousand Expected to Throng Grounds on Opening Day Listed and Include Four-Day Speed Program,” which was four days of bicycle racing for state championship titles.\textsuperscript{101}

Working in tandem with the success of juvenile marketing, renewed interest in amateur racing and sociability afforded by cycling clubs was an important factor in the industry’s ability to attain that mark of one million bicycles sold. Even before the WPA created officially designated areas for races, cyclists participated in “‘boot-leg’ races . . . during the early hours of the morning” on public streets and boulevards.\textsuperscript{102} As Sprague pointed out, these races did not draw much attention or publicity because of their secretive and illegal nature. Still, the Parks Department of New York City was certainly aware, just as the WPA was aware of the need for a velodrome in Chicago. Moses admitted, “To satisfy the insistent demand of the bicycle racing enthusiasts, we plan to construct a quarter mile track with bleachers and field house facilities in the section of


\textsuperscript{101} “Make Ready for Opening of Fair,” Shelbyville Democrat, August 7, 1937.

Pelham Bay Park. . .”¹⁰³ Sprague was a little more specific claiming, “amateur bike racing has thousands of passionate supporters. Membership in the city’s fifteen racing clubs has increased 50 per cent in the past year.”¹⁰⁴ More importantly, Sprague argued, was the fact that the Amateur Bicycle League had recently been admitted to the Amateur Athletic Union, “which mean[t] that amateur cycle racing ha[d] at last achieved the eminence of a national sport.”¹⁰⁵

Six-day racing also regained popularity. It was very popular in the first half of the 1920s, grossing as much as $250,000 a week at Madison Square Garden.¹⁰⁶ Even through the 1930s, attendance at the Garden remained around 100,000 paying spectators per week and attracting celebrities like Al Capone and his entourage.¹⁰⁷ Six-day racing was for a certain type of spectator, however, as the races continued through the night and were well suited for gambling, drinking, smoking and other vices. They included large prize purses and therefore the competitors were all professionals. With the rise in amateur racing in the late 1930s, competitive cycling garnered even more interest.

The CTA used these competitive events for publicity announcing, “Amateur bicycle road races are popular throughout the spring, summer and fall months—open to all boys and offering opportunity to win valuable prizes.”¹⁰⁸ The resurging popularity of amateur races provided an opportunity to fortify those links between health and cycling, which the industry had been working to imprint on American consumers over the past

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.
¹⁰⁵ Ibid.
¹⁰⁶ Nye, Peter, Jeff Groman, and Mark Tyson. The Six-Day Bicycle Races. (San Francisco: Van der Plas Publications, 2006), 68.
¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 149.
four decades. Simultaneously—when used by adults—the image of the bicycle became associated with exercise and hard-work rather than a practical and utilitarian means of transportation. With headlines like “The Bicycle Builds Rugged Health, Physicians Prescribe Cycling, [and] Boyhood is the time to build better Manhood” the CTA continued to promote the bicycle as a healthy activity for children.\textsuperscript{109} While bicycle racing could be used to generate good publicity for the bicycle industry, it was also rich with opportunities for making proclamations about ideals of gender and nation.

Among the race programs and fliers of the 1930s, promoters devoted a considerable amount of space to ideals of nationalism and manhood. A flier for an international six-day bicycle race held in Louisville, Kentucky included pictures and short bios of each competitor. These bios told spectators where the rider was from in the first sentence so they could better identify with, or classify, them. The bio for Alfred Marquet said he “was born in Paris, France, where cycling is taken seriously and is the national sport of Europe.”\textsuperscript{110} Not only did this point out the deficiencies of bicycle culture in the U.S. compared to France, but it also gave spectators more reason to be excited about the potential for Americans racing to victory. The program also reminded readers of the danger that the brave racers faced. The bio for American, Bobby Walthour, one of the longest in the program—no doubt because of Walthour’s success and notoriety in cycling—describes how, in 1927, Walthour “was nearly killed when he crashed through the railing at the top of the track in Chicago. His partner, McNamara, gamely rode for four hours until Bobby gained consciousness. When Bobby returned to the track he received the greatest ovation ever given an athlete. The team continued on

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 3, 5, and 8.
and won the race.” The story gave spectators an illustration of how riders like Walthour embodied the manly ideals of toughness, courage, and perseverance. These athletes served not only to give some masculine legitimacy to bicycles, but also as potential heroes for young boys.

Advertisements included in the programs of competitive events were fairly general, yet local, in nature. There were a few, however, that attempted to connect their product to the sport. The ads on the back cover, paid for by companies that were most likely a partial sponsor of the event, were more direct in their appeals to manhood. An advertisement for the Ewing Von Allmen company stated, “Whether You Ride A Bicycle or An Automobile Ewing Von Allmen Dairy Products Give You Strength and Endurance. You would be surprised at the quantities of Ewing Von Allmen Dairy Products these riders consume daily.” On the back cover of another program, a Baby Ruth advertisement said, “There’s Muscle ‘fuel’ in Every Bar of Delicious [Curtiss Baby Ruth] because it’s rich in DEXTROSE the Sugar you need for Energy.” The spectacle of racing not only gave the bicycle industry and important opportunity for publicity but it also brought in a myriad of other companies that used ideals of manhood to promote their product. The assumption was that many who were actively or passively consuming cycling as sport would also be interested in products that could help them build muscles or give them energy, both of which were important traits if one was to achieve, or maintain, manliness. Companies went so far as to produce trading cards with the name and pictures of bicycle racers. Instead of listing their stats on the back, there were

111 Ibid.
112 Ibid., back cover.
advertisements.\textsuperscript{114} Cards were a way to get boys excited about bicycles. They also presented another opportunity to sell ad space and generate revenue for race promoters and manufacturers.

The CTA connected the masculinizing effects of cycling as sport to success as an adult, no matter what career was chosen. It told readers, “You will be surprised how much a bicycle will help a fellow to make something of himself when he grows up. There is hardly a big star in athletics, in sports, even a big gun in business or profession, who did not build his health and strength by riding a bicycle during his kid days.”\textsuperscript{115} Included were examples such as Shirley Mason and Dick Barthelmes; athletes like Babe Ruth, Charlie Paddock, Jack Dempsey, and Helen Willis; as well as the Prince of Wales and Charles Lindbergh.

Those who were successful in “business or profession” presumably did not have time for the bicycle once they were adults, “but most athletes, aviators, racing drivers, track stars, boxers and all others whose success depends upon rugged health and strength . . .” continued to use the bicycle after adulthood “as a big part of their training.”\textsuperscript{116} Some effort was made to include girls as beneficiaries of cycling, albeit in a limited context. The CTA added, “All that we have said of bicycle riding for pleasure and health applies equally to the girls. Bicycles are now extensively used by girls of all ages everywhere – at boarding schools, colleges and at the famous and smart winter resorts.”\textsuperscript{117} Again, girls were treated as something of an afterthought or catchall and for them, the bicycle was a means for health and pleasure, not strength, independence or other attributes commonly

\textsuperscript{114} Bicycle Trading Card, Charles Wehr Collection Box 1, Folder 7 (Indiana Historical Society). In this particular instance the advertisement was for Marott’s Shoe Store.


\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
associated with manhood. The majority of the points made specifically addressed boys, comments such as “the bike is every boy’s birthright” and “Every dad wants his boy to have all the wholesome fun he can find.”

Competitive cyclists were not the only ones lending legitimacy to cycling; there was also a growing club movement in which some of the riders were more interested in getting out for some casual exercise. Rather than seeing how fast they could go, they challenged themselves by traveling greater distances—riding centuries. Still, some were content to simply get out for a ten-mile “stroll.” Sprague estimated there to be around 30,000 organized cyclists and a number of independent riders in New York, and some 80,000 citizens who rode bicycles “for the fun of it” in Detroit.

Cycling news was abundant in the pages of the *New York Times* during the 1890s but had become an outright rarity in the 1920s and 30s. Cycle clubs had slogans to “Bring Back the Happy Days of the 1890s” and Sprague was of the opinion that those “happy days” had already returned. Even though the number of sales in 1896-1898 and 1936-1938 were over one million, the price had come down significantly. Bicycles averaged around $60 in 1899 but were closer to $30 in average price in 1937. In attempt to bring back those happy days of the 1890s, organizers planned a bicycle parade and carnival to take place in Central Park. “A section of the parade would re-create the cycling craze of the Nineties, when riding a bike was a prime requisite for those who searched to move in higher social circles.”

To recreate this atmosphere, the participants planned to “wear the costumes of the period, the woman in high-laced shoes,

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119 A “century” is when a cyclist rides a hundred miles in a single day.
121 Ibid.
122 Ibid.
full skirts and shirtwaists, the men in short knickers and roll-necked sweaters. Some of the women would appear in sailor hats with short feathers, too, and even bloomers, as a sign of special daring.”

Even if the riders were merely dressed up and playing a part, this exercise, and the parade in particular, expressed a deep sense of nostalgia for the “happy days of the 1890s” not coincidentally, an era that featured a boom for the U.S. economy. Just as many other forms of leisure and recreation, in 1938, cycling served as a popular form of escapism.

In her study of leisure during the New Deal, Susan Currell writes “there . . . emerged a new psychological approach to national welfare that argued for recreation that would help mend the Depression-battered psyche and aid adjustment to the new social and leisured order . . . . National and economic breakdown was paralleled with personal breakdown under the strain of modern living and economic insecurity—leisure provided the most effective and nondivisive path out of this personal and national trauma.”

Dressing up in costumes of the 1890s and parading about on bicycles provided such a path.

While the American bicycle industry was certainly poised and willing to take advantage of the marketing opportunities leisure and competitive cycling provided, it was otherwise unwilling to go all-in and redirect a large portion of advertising on adults or racing models. Frank Schwinn was a notable exception, producing a costly lightweight racing model called the Paramount in 1938. Production of the Paramount proved too expensive to be profitable. It was around $75, the most expensive model in the Schwinn

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124 Morris Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark: A Cultural History of the Great Depression* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009), 358. Dickstein argues that scholars have “paid little attention to the seemingly frivolous, freewheeling side of the decade, [with an] entertainment culture often seen merely as escapist.”
line and experienced little success outside of the professional track racing circuit.\textsuperscript{126} Otherwise, bicycle manufacturers stuck to the heavier streamlined models with balloon tires because they seemed to offer stable sales.

Much like the utilitarian consumer, the industry was unwilling to invest their time or effort leading consumers to competitive cycling. While admitting that French bicycle consumers were somewhat different from their American counterparts, ex racer Hans Ohrt believed the progress of the French bicycle industry provided an important lesson. He pointed out that most of the participants of a local road race from New York to Philadelphia rode bicycles that were produced in foreign countries.\textsuperscript{127} He also called attention to the considerable amount of advertising and promotion for the makes and models of bicycles used to ride to victory in French races. While American bicycles were focusing on bulkier designs that appeared to be sturdier, he contended, “France has increased its volume by concentrating on three models, namely, tourist, Tour de France and ladies. Double-bars, truss frames, stands, weighty saddles and oversize tires have long been excluded in any and all equipment as manufactured by the factories of Continental Europe.”\textsuperscript{128} In short, the production of heavy bicycles in the U.S. and lack of attention to lightweight adult models was an “untold handicap for the exportation of American bicycles.”\textsuperscript{129}

The industry viewed leisure and juvenile riders as the more cost-effective share of the market. Both could be sold bicycles made of cheaper materials and they did not require any effort in overcoming changing perceptions about bicycles as a means of fun


\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 16.

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.
and diversion. By remaining content to sell heavy inefficient models, the industry did more than simply sit back while the image of the bicycle transformed, it actually encouraged it.

Along with adult models, children’s models were significantly heavier because of manufacturer’s attempts to imitate automotive and motorcycle designs. The top tube was modified to look like a gas tank, and many bicycles were beginning to include speedometers. While they were not designed to actually go fast, at least they would look like they could, and better yet, boys could pretend that they were flying along on a motorcycle, car, or even in a jet-plane. An advertisement for the Elgin Blackhawk bicycle boasted the inclusion of a "Streamline twin bar motorcycle type frame and tank, Rubber cushioned frame, Electric disc style horn, Allstate balloon tires with new treaded sidewall, Chromium plated headlight, rims, handlebars, truss rods and sprockets, Stainless steel mudguards, [and] Motorcycle style streamline luggage carrier." No doubt, hearing a bicycle described much like a motorcycle, or even their fathers' new Ford, made bicycles more desirable for boys who were anxious to achieve manhood.

"Balloon" tires became a standard on all leisure bicycles. In addition to having a fun-loving—kid-friendly—name, the tires were designed to be extremely sturdy and to provide more cushion (fig. 5.2). At the same time, these tires were heavier and added increased rolling resistance due to their width, tread, and lower pressure. This attention to sturdier bicycle designs for kids allowed them to get more use out of their bikes as they were able to take them off road, through yards and gravel lots, but they were not suited for fast or efficient travel. First introduced by Schwinn in 1933, the balloon tire was an

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“undeniable asset for the child’s model” and a reason children’s bikes became more popular in the 1930s, argues David Herlihy.\(^\text{132}\)

Bicycles had quickly become a boy’s primary means for adventure and exploration. They were capable of assisting boys in their pursuit of knowledge about their surrounding neighborhood. A model made by Elgin included a "Loud 'Wildcat' siren."\(^\text{133}\) The siren, while an obvious safety feature, was more important and functional for kids in its ability to better allow them to imagine themselves as cops as they chased their "robber" friends around the neighborhood.

While children may have found their bicycles liberating, parents undoubtedly took comfort in the heavy, inefficient designs, and smaller gear ratios that served to limit how far their kids could comfortably get from home. Children’s bicycles became representative of a lesser form of independence in which bicycle riders were tethered relatively close to home. Ohrt agreed, highlighting the fact that there were 17-pound bicycles produced in 1895, yet by 1925 “the school boy is the important user and regardless of wishes or demand he, of about 80 lbs. in weight, is expected to cycle with pleasure on a high geared bicycle of nearly half his weight.”\(^\text{134}\) In spite of the weight, children took to bicycles with enthusiasm and their numbers continued to grow.

T.J. Sullivan explained the growth of the children’s market as a response to the growth of the automotive industry. He wrote,

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\(^\text{132}\) Herlihy, *Bicycle*, 327. It is interesting to consider the effect of the balloon tire on bicycle sales since its introduction coincided with the upward trend in sales beginning in 1933. The balloon tire alone, however, was not responsible for the industry’s recovery. Census data shows that various consumer goods bounced back by 1934 and it was not until 1936 that bicycle sales experienced the exponential growth in sales that went significantly beyond output numbers leading up to 1933.


As soon as automobiles became too thick on the highways, these wise dealers saw that co-operation with parents to keep children off the streets and onto the sidewalks was a good selling point, and in co-operation with the wise manufacturers who first capitalized the safety idea by producing sidewalk safety vehicles. These are natural sidelines for the bicycle. Dealers sell sidewalk safety vehicles first, then, as children approach the ages where they desire to increase their play range, they sell them bicycles which will convey them to the parks and public playgrounds where they can play in safety.\textsuperscript{135}

Even though older children’s bicycles could convey them greater distances, they were still designed in a manner that made them rather inefficient. Manufacturers focused on comfort, safety, and style. As a result, the bicycles they produced were cumbersome and difficult to ride at high speeds for extended periods. These were bicycles for the neighborhood, not the city. They were great for a kid who just needed to get to a park or a friend’s house but they also taught children to think about bicycles in a limited capacity. An unintentional repercussion was that these children would grow up to believe using the bicycle for transportation around the city, rather than around the neighborhood, was impractical.

Manufacturers who focused on children, often specifically on boys, attempted to make the bicycle more marketable precisely by making their product bulkier—and by design, less efficient. Companies also began recreating and renaming their juvenile models. Bicycle parts were renamed to correspond in description to motorized vehicles. An advertisement for Montgomery Ward & Company advertised, “Here it is Boys! The new 1928 Flyer Motobike, just equipped with New Model C improved multiple disk type New Departure Coaster Brake.”\textsuperscript{136} The incorporation of automotive industry type jargon


appealed to boys’ desire to have the most advanced models, with descriptions that sounded very similar to adult’s commodities.

Elgin bicycles also tried to capitalize on notions of “progress.” One of their ads featured a picture of a couple riding a tandem from the 1880s next to a picture of their newest model. The ad proclaimed, “Wheels of Progress. 50 YEARS AGO, the contraption at the left was a luxury—TODAY, at Sears prices, beautiful, streamlined, balloon-tired bicycles are within the reach of everyone.” 137 The bike included all the finest accoutrements such as a dashboard—with speedometer inlaid—a kick stand, luggage rack, and a new saddle. The front of the frame was even designed to appear to have a headlight, as well as a “hood ornament” attached to the front mudguard. In imitating automobiles, bicycle manufacturers demonstrated that in their own opinion, the best way to improve a bicycle and make it more marketable was to model it after automobiles. An advertisement for Huffman bicycles in 1940 told boys, “There’s motor-car flash in this streamlined hood and chrome grille, which houses the horn and dual headlites. The slip-stream design of this new chain guard makes it the keenest thing that ever concealed a sprocket. Smooth? You’ll say so when you see this streamlined chrome frame luggage carrier with its built-in taillite. This slip-stream rear fender adds the final touch of motor-car styling.” 138 Columbia bicycles had similar ads, one of which described a model as having “that rarin’-to-go motor-cycle look. See how that tank is streamlined into the racy-built frame. Look at those deeper, wider fenders, those shining white sidewall tires. And talk about colors—the flashing tones and stripings just knock

138 Huffman Manufacturing Company, “Fit As a Fiddle and Twice as Sweet,” Boy’s Life, May, 1940, 30.
Advertisements for kids bicycles told young consumers that they not only wanted a bicycle that was fun to ride, nor one that simply had all the latest embellishments, they wanted one that would give them the “thrill” of hearing the “gang” proclaim, “It’s a Beauty!” They needed a bicycle they would “be proud to parade . . . before [their] friends.”

Manufacturers continued to design juvenile bicycles in this ornate style, including increasingly sophisticated components. By 1941, bicycles included such amenities as a ‘Duo-Beam’ stop light/tail light. The advertisement for the light said, “Scree-ee-eech and traffic pulls up sharp behind you . . . when you slam on your brake and flash this brilliant Stop Light. . . . Brake operates stop light by means of an automatic switch—just like the stop light on dad’s automobile. Tail light glows steadily—operates by separate hand switch. Entire unit built into luggage carrier, offered for the first time by Sears!”

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140 Shelby Bicycle Company, “100 Thrills and Hour!” Boy’s Life, May, 1940, 36.
The advertisement pictured a boy and girl leaning on their bicycles, looking at each other, the boy smiling and the girl with a hand on her cheek, practically swooning over the boy with a bicycle that was as nearly sophisticated as a car. The girls’ model featured many of the same components as the boys' models—as far as safety and design—except there were two noticeable differences, one being the dropped top-tube and the other being a dress guard over the back wheel. Both were designed to allow girls more convenience and the ability to ride a bicycle while wearing a dress. This marked difference in frame design was an important distinguishing factor for boys. Whereas girls would sometimes hop on their brother's, or another boy's bike, boys were much less inclined to ride a girl’s bicycle. A trade magazine article called this fact to the attention of salesmen, reminding...
them, “Many girls ride and even prefer a boy's wheel, but no boy will be caught riding a girls bicycle.”142

Advertisements and other articles about the virtues of the boy market implied that as soon as boys were old enough to drive, they were unlikely to ride a bicycle at all. They reminded readers, “your dad rode one when he was a boy. . .” attempting to stir a sense of nostalgia in fathers who remembered the fun they had while emphasizing that the bicycle was part of the childhood experience.143 Because of this, manufacturers and, in turn, merchants did not invest as much of their advertising money on the adult market. Not only were they relatively ignoring those over sixteen, but they were also conditioning those under sixteen to long for the day they were old enough to drive a real car, or motorcycle. The bicycle industry would find it increasingly difficult to foster a market for adults when it was responsible for adding to American consumers’ love of cars by imprinting onto children notions that the most desirable bicycles were the ones that were best in blurring the lines between bicycles and automobiles. The only thing that was missing for many of these bicycles was a motor and a licensed driver. In their response to consumer desires, bicycle manufactures stirred a fascination with automobiles in a decidedly young and relatively new consumer group that the automotive industry had yet to fully appreciate.144

144 Jacobson, Raising Consumers, 97-98, and 116. There was a growing belief among ad agencies that the boy’s opinion was critical even when peddling adults’ consumer goods. Jacobson argues that “Thanks to the special affection middle class parents held for their sons, boys proved remarkably influential salesman.” She reproduces advertisements proclaiming the boy was the “Dictator to the Universe” and another capturing an exchange between a son and father who had just come home with a new car battery. The boy asks, “Did’ja get the ‘Super B’ I told you about?”
The bicycle, now occupying the status of a child's toy, had become one of the first commodities in Americans’ lives that they were led to believe they had to have. Once children were conditioned to be consumers, they could be taught to be conspicuous about it. Bicycle advertisements directed at children had already used envy to appeal to kids for a number of years. By the late 1920s, rather than simply selling kids any bicycle, advertisements pushed the bicycles that looked the most advanced and therefore the most expensive models. Boys in advertisements told their friends, “Gee! Dad went the limit and got me the Best There Is.” The ad told boys they could get the regular model “without extra equipment” for $45 or for $50 they could get the “super” model “completely equipped with the latest and best of everything. . . .”145 Advertisements offering bicycles as prizes to entice boys to sell magazine subscriptions said, “Oh Boy! Take a look at this flashy 1935 deluxe model motorbike. It can soon be Yours! Comes fully equipped with electric headlight, chime siren, platform carrier, rear wheel stand, coaster brake, and other outstanding features.”146 By 1940, companies were comfortable being more direct in their ads, “It’s just too bad if the other kids are green with envy as you climb on this Deluxe Dayton Mainliner, and lead the bicycle parade by a mile. But, come on—let’s go to town in motor car style on the bike that’s proud and poised—and packed full of life, looks and eye-catching features. Yeah Man!—make way for the Dayton Mainliner. . . .”147 Newspaper articles demonstrated that boys and bicycles had become so intertwined that it would be a mistake for parents to deny them while simultaneously demonstrating the racial and class divide that existed among bicycle

145 Iver Johnson Manufacturing Company, “Gee! Dad went the limit and got me the Best There Is,” Boy’s Life, May, 1929, 50.
147 Huffman Manufacturing Company, “Fit As a Fiddle and Twice as Sweet,” Boy’s Life, May, 1940, 30.
consumers. One such article told of a young boy (presumed African-American because of the language and venue) who had unsuccessfully attempted to steal a bicycle on more than ten separate occasions—each time his efforts were thwarted by local police. The article rejoiced at the fact that after the police had appealed to the public to buy the young boy a bicycle—so they could stop being bothered by him—an “anonymous life-term convict, a white woman, and a minister . . . forked up the money.”

While bicycle manufacturers altered designs and their advertisements honed in on notions of conspicuous consumption and conformity, bicycle shops also altered their tactics. Merely adding children’s models to their stock allegedly “enable[d] the small dealer who relies on his repair shop mainly for a livelihood to graduate into the merchant class.” T.J. Sullivan argued that offering children’s models could “double and treble” the volume of sales because “since the wheeled goods business depends on the patronage of women, the repair shop man who has hitherto exhibited a bicycle or two in a window or on the repair shop floor, promptly realizes that women will not patronize such an establishment. Therefore, he proceeds to separate the repair shop from the sales room and making this so attractive that women are as likely to enter it for shopping as to enter any other store in town.” Industry leaders had clearly been encouraging merchants to make their shops clean and inviting since the 1910s but this was a much more overt statement about the gendered implications of refashioning bike shops to make products more marketable. It is also unique in its attention to the patronage of women. A majority

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148 “Won’t Need to Steal Another Bicycle Now,” Chicago Defender, September 5, 1936, national edition. The assumption that the young boy was black is based on this article’s appearance in the Chicago Defender a newspaper for African Americans and because the article is specific about the race of the woman that contributed to the fund to buy the boy a bike. If it had been a white boy her race would have been assumed white as well.


150 Ibid.
of the advertisements from this particular era targeted fathers, or told children to get their father to buy them a bike. This direct appeal to women and mothers, however, would become more common place, particularly after World War II.

Success for the U.S. bicycle industry began in 1934, when “apparent consumption” reached the 500,000 mark and would stay above that number consistently—excluding 1943 and 1944.\textsuperscript{151} This upturn, however, was something of a mystery for merchants and industry officials who were divided on the cause of slumping sales and what course of action should be taken to remedy the problem. Treating the resurgence of cycling among adults in the 1930s as only natural, outside of advocating for bicycle paths, little was done in the way of marketing to insure that the number of adults riding bicycles would grow or even continue. It was apparent that the brevity of the bicycle boom of the 1890s predicated on adult participation in cycling and the long struggle over the 1900s and 1910s to bring adults back to the bike had deeply affected the industry. The move to juvenile marketing was an outward expression of the bicycle industry’s distrust of adult consumers. There was little faith that adults were the best demographic for stable sales and little confidence in even being able to attract those consumers after the automobile supplanted the bicycle in numerous respects. The economic downturn of the 1930s played a bigger role than the industry seemed willing to admit because it showed that the industry’s alteration of bicycle marketing and design, which began as early as 1913 had paid off. It demonstrated the stability that juvenile consumers provided, even in the face of an economic downturn. The industry would not know for sure, however, until a decade or two later, once prolonged sales over the million mark proved a reality.

Coupled with the Great Depression, was a short-lived yet important increase in governmental support of cycling. In their goal of stimulating “desirable” forms of leisure and recreation, the WPA aided in the creation of velodromes and cycling paths, both of which gave adult cyclists venues for cycling safely, away from increasingly crowded streets. These adults rode bicycles because they found themselves with considerably more free time and they used recreation as a means to escape and rejuvenate, not for transportation. The velodromes and paths created would have done little to help them navigate the city since one was a track strictly for competition and the paths were too disjointed to piece together routes for commuting. After World War II, governmental support of cycling would take a back seat while subsidies for oil companies and automobile manufacturers would become more prevalent.

For industry elites, heightened sales were predicated on the success of advertising to the juvenile market. Suburbanization provided a convenient and somewhat safe environment for juveniles to ride while greatly complicating utilitarian use of the bicycle among adult suburbanites. The second half of the 1930s, however, showed that there was still some hope, that the bicycle could overcome the automobile in the hearts and minds of American adults. But if increased adult participation came without much of a contribution from bicycle marketing, boosters wondered why they should bother spending their advertising dollars on adults. Manufacturers did not let the influx of adult consumers influence their decisions either.

152 Currell, The March of Spare Time, 51. Currell writes, “Recreation was of central importance to WPA administrator Harry Hopkins, who allocated at least 30 percent of the WPA budget (around $11 billion in all by 1943) toward recreation projects. While New Deal construction projects worked to repair or build more than two thousand swimming pools and create parks, playgrounds, stadiums, grandstands, bleachers, fairgrounds, athletic fields, tennis courts, golf courses, ice-skating rinks, ski runs, and bandstands, the recreation projects were concerned chiefly with organizing leadership programs so that facilities could receive proper use and supervision.”
The fact that some athletes continued riding bicycles after adulthood was used to publicize bicycles, as was the spectacle of amateur and professional bicycle racing. Still, American manufacturers failed to even try to take the next step, to rejuvenate production of racing models for adults or to offer and promote juvenile bicycles that were actually capable of going fast. They expressed excitement about the sight of adults on bicycles en masse, but nothing else about marketing or design really seemed to change. The few who did see an opportunity and tried to take advantage of it, like Frank W. Schwinn, were not taken seriously. Frank Schwinn got the sense that he was often swimming against the current, dubbing himself “the heretic.”

Even in the case of Schwinn, who was trying to market a top-of-the-line lightweight racing machine, the targeted consumer was the serious competitor, not the leisure rider, which undoubtedly existed in greater quantities than racers. Still, increased involvement in competitive cycling could have netted increased sales of leisure models. It is difficult to judge whether manufacturers could have prolonged adult interest in bicycles beyond 1938 if they had paid attention to the needs of utilitarian and commuting cyclists, but at least it would have made a statement that another option still existed—bicycles were not just for play.

Conversely, why would the industry devote time to commuters that needed a utilitarian bicycle when so many cars were on the road? Bicycle and parts manufacturers were hemmed in by concerns over those cars and instead of trying to overcome the problem, it circumvented it. At the same time, marketing bicycles for juveniles was

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153 Pridmore and Hurd, Schwinn Bicycles, 49.
154 In the bicycle industry, much like the automotive industry, competitive success leads to increased purchases of non-racing models. NASCAR has often touted, “Win on Sunday, sale on Monday.” See: Robert Lipsyte, “Auto Racing; Success on the Track Leads To Sales in the Showroom” New York Times (June 10, 2001). In a similar vein, Bicycle sales in the U.S. saw a drastic upsurge with Lance Armstrong’s success in the Tour de France.
rather convenient. Rather than revolutionizing adult perceptions of the bicycle, the industry could simply rehash old appeals for a new demographic. By focusing on ideals of adolescent masculinity, the bicycle industry was able to survive through the use of an old advertising technique on a new audience.

Ultimately, the move to marketing and designing bicycles for children would prove a stroke of genius that would pay dividends in the long-run. Not only did youthful consumerism keep the industry steady through the Great Depression, it got sales figures back to where they were during cycling’s Golden Age from 1896-98 and kept them there. It was not merely a successful marketing strategy, it was a revolution. The bicycle industry would prove to many other American industries that the child consumer was indeed a powerful ally. Even though many began targeting children as early as 1920, the bicycle’s success was a major testament that would fortify the entrepreneurial gold rush toward young consumers in the decades to follow.

Success came at a significant price. In focusing their attention on the juvenile market, the industry took a step toward transforming the bicycle from a legitimate form of locomotion and exercise for American adults, into a child's toy. While bicycles certainly represented a means of practicing masculine activities, it was not until they graduated to real automobiles—not toy replicas—that boys could truly become men. For a majority of Americans, bicycle-marketing schemes essentially destroyed the bicycle’s masculine credibility among adults. New bicycle designs led to the transformation in which the bike became a vehicle for boys to understand their role in the world as would-be masculine figures. As a boy, a bicycle allowed individuals to reconnoiter their neighborhoods, but that was only training for the day that they could pilot a real
automobile across a much broader landscape. Certainly for those old enough to drive, automobiles were significantly more desirable than bicycles and the bicycle industry helped insure adults would choose cars over bikes by reshaping the bicycles’ image as a second-class consumer object, one that merely tried to impersonate another. By altering bicycles to serve as a stepping stone to motorized vehicles, the bicycle became stigmatized as a lesser means of mobility.\footnote{The impact has been long lasting. As of 2006, whereas only 2\% of trips were made with a bicycle in the U.S., in the Netherlands the number was 26\% followed by Denmark with 19\% and then Germany with 10\%. These numbers are approximate rather than absolute. Researchers admit, “there are no reliable international/European statistics showing comparable figures per country.” Ministrie van Verkeer en Waterstaat, “Cycling in the Netherlands” www.fietsberaad.nl/library/repository/bestanden/cyclinginthenetherlands2009.pdf; Ben Block, “In Amsterdam, the Bicycle Still Rules” Worldwatch Institute: Vision for a Sustainable World www.worldwatch.org/node/6022;}

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The bicycle industry had made such great progress by the end of the 1930s that advertisements for a wide array of children’s goods incorporated bicycles into their own marketing. They were confident the image of the bicycle, or even just the word, would grab children’s attention. An advertisement for Cocomalt, a chocolate milk “protective food drink” pictured a boy and girl riding bicycles side-by-side. The copy proclaimed, “You need Pep to be Popular and here’s how to get it!” It continued, “every glass of cocomalt with milk gives you one hour of energy for bicycling.” This energy would be vital to children who wanted to be good at sports “a leader at parties . . ., [and] to do all the things that make a boy or girl stand out in the crowd.”1 This ad was reminiscent of advertisements for dietary supplements that claimed to help men reclaim their manhood, which ran alongside bicycle advertisements in the 1890s. Other companies such as Lifebuoy soap and Keds tennis shoes waged similar campaigns, targeting juveniles’ desires to be popular among their peers. The tactic of using peer society to influence consumer practices among the juvenile audience had become ubiquitous in children’s mass media since the 1920s.2 What is noteworthy about the cocomalt advertisement is that the company tied an unrelated consumer item to its own to grab children’s attention and encourage them to consume cocomalt. To be popular, you needed a bike and you needed cocomalt to give you the energy to use that bicycle to attain fitness. Just as the

1 “Cocomalt, Energy by the Glassful” Boys’ Life, May 1938, 32.
bicycle was symbolic of class and gender ideals for adults at the end of the nineteenth century, it now symbolized the youth and vigor of white middle class children.

The fact that advertisements, and entertainment targeting America’s youth frequently incorporated the image of the bicycle proved that it had become symbolic of childhood. Youth culture of the 1950s shows that the industry’s proclamation that the bicycle was the birthright of every American boy—made in the 1920s—had become widely accepted. This “age of affluence” would prove to be a time for mass consumption of a vast array of luxury and leisure items. It was a period marked by a booming economy.³ Record levels of consumption were not predicated on adults alone. Lisa Jacobson shows that childhood consumerism, which was accelerating in the post-war era, was under way by 1910.⁴ Associating the genesis of children’s consumerism with the 1950s is a misconception. The post-war era was, however, a time in which the power of the children’s demographic became irrefutable—as it captivated the attention of countless entrepreneurs and manufacturers.

This chapter traces the final step of the bicycle’s evolution from a commodity for adults to one for children. It does not simply document the bicycle industry’s attempts to expand its young demographic; it also examines the manner in which World War II and its aftermath shaped culture and policy in ways that worked for and against bicycle consumption in the United States. The industry, in turn, continued to react to and use those alterations to boost sales. This included a small amount of marketing to adults but only as a means to relive their childhood and demonstrate agelessness, to maintain

⁴ Jacobson, *Raising Consumers*, 16-55. Jacobson traces the development back to the 1890s but some of her more convincing evidence comes from the 1910s and 20s.
beauty, or to gradually restore gendered ideals damaged and depleted by traumatic events such as World War II. Otherwise, the industry continued the type of appeals to children well-established by the 1920s and 1930s, but now more boldly than ever before. While automotive sales continued to outpace bicycle sales, the bicycle industry reaped the benefits of a growing culture of consumption among children and teen-agers, thereby experiencing a steady growth in sales.

Bicycle and Automobile Consumption, 1946-1955

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<tr>
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Table 6.1

After World War II, manufacturers continued to reshape the bicycle to make it more esthetically appealing for young consumers. Arnold, Schwinn & Company went so far as to create a whole new department, comprised of men who had previously engineered and developed motorcycles. Their mission was to modernize and improve the appearance and quality of the bicycle. Such departments led the way in redesigning the bicycles of the 1930s to look more sophisticated and bulky. After 1945, manufacturers and bicycle designers would go even further toward remaking the bicycle into an apparatus of child’s play. It was at this point that they begin creating bicycles that were literally toys, equipping them with holsters for cap-guns, and donning them with the insignia of child television stars and comic book heroes, or even cartoon characters such as Donald Duck. Even though bicycle marketing and design was aimed at a decidedly

younger audience by the 1950s, the industry reacted to shifts in culture to ensure that the bicycle still served as a gateway to manhood. This was particularly true with juvenile models for boys who had outgrown cartoons, those who had moved on to westerns, comic books, and mysteries. The bicycle’s ability to provide masculine training grew in importance as World War II and the Cold War shaped the way Americans thought about manhood. There was a renewed focus on vigor. Suzanne Clark argues, “Manliness itself, and the old warrior ethic it invoked, was on trial. The return from World War II plunged American men into a confusion about identities that literature as well as mass culture struggled to address.”

This chapter shows that this struggle over the way Americans would define manhood also manifested itself in the mass culture and consumer objects directed at boys—the future of American manhood.

In his study of automotive culture in the United States, Cotton Seiler ties gendered ideals of the post-war period to the concept of mobility. He writes, “Promising a return to the mythologized past and heralding a limitless, abundant future, automobility seemed to offer the symbolic means to restore the American character—a character figured as masculine. . . . [D]riving ‘masculinized’ as the automobile began to colonize the cultural, economic, and political landscape of the United States.”

The Interstate Highway System enacted under President Eisenhower spurred the “radical expansion of automobility” in the 1950s and 1960s onward. That system and the relatively unabated (except by war)

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6 Suzanne Clark, *Cold Warriors: Manliness on Trial in the Rhetoric of the West* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 1-3. In her discussion of mass culture Clark emphasizes the rise in popularity of the Western, Adventure, and Crime Fiction genres. She argues that this trend reveals a “hypermasculine crisis” that was difficult even to notice because “it called upon the nostalgia for the old discourses of the West (the national manliness asserted by Theodore Roosevelt) to claim that there was and always had been only one real American identity.”


8 Ibid., 72.
rise of automobile consumption continued to shape bicycle marketing. The connections Seiler draws between mobility, masculinity, and Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis were also evident in the bicycle. As opposed to the car, however, the circumscribed mobility embodied by the bicycle could only serve to either introduce, or repair, the concepts and tenets of white adult masculinity.

World War II—while temporarily hindering bicycle sales—reenergized nationalistic ideals that the bicycle industry could then employ in its own favor. A growing hosteling movement (discussed later) and an emphasis on a child’s independence, as well as encouragements for parents to prepare their children for a business career at an early age, were endeavors for which the bicycle was well suited. To a degree, the politics of the post-war era were also beneficial for bicycle and parts manufactures in the United States. President Eisenhower and Mayor Richard Daly of Chicago endorsed the bicycle and enacted policies, or created the infrastructure (in Daly’s case) that would encourage cycling. In other ways, however, political policy stifled bicycle use. This was especially true among adults because domestic policy helped make automobiles more pervasive by ensuring that oil companies, gas stations, roadside businesses, the trucking industry, and highway departments would all receive a more than generous amount of monetary support from the federal government in the 1950s. After temporarily regaining popularity among American adults in 1936-38, the bicycle would not captivate the attention of adults again until the 1970s. It would take an energy crisis and exercise boom for bicycles to regain appeal among adult

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9 Ibid., 47. Seiler writes that automobility was “sanctioned as a vehicle for individual and national renascence—a means to resuscitate republican selfhood and reopen the frontier.”
consumers. To be sure, the Depression and post-war era showed that the bicycle industry had found a source of stability and even growth in the children’s market, but its product was often affected by the whims of consumer culture, as well as the decisions of political leaders. American culture, the continued expansion of suburbs, and political decisions regarding infrastructure ensured the proliferation of automobile consumption and intensified changes in bicycle consumption. Simultaneously, the bicycle industry exacerbated the divide between childhood and adulthood as a line that was defined by one’s form of mobility. The bicycle’s transformation as a consumer item was completed over the course of five decades and it would prove hard to reverse or move beyond the bicycle’s consumer identity in the more than sixty years that followed.

My argument that the bicycle industry continued tactics used in the 1920s and 30s and that the transformation of the bicycle was complete by the 1950s, is not meant to suggest that the bicycle or American culture was stagnant. Certainly, the bicycle industry would continue to react and respond to ever-changing consumer culture and at the same time, be affected by governmental and diplomatic decisions. World War II, for instance, brought about governmental decisions and shaped cultural ideals in ways that had an important impact on the bicycle industry. Bicycle sales slumped to less than 200,000 in 1943 and 1944, down from over one million in 1941, but they surpassed all previously recorded sales estimates in 1947—with a total U.S. market consumption of over 2.8 million units. Sales would not dip below one million ever again, and other than a few exceptions, sales continued on an upward trend through the 1960s. The war and its aftermath, however, presented both opportunities and obstacles for the industry.

The most apparent obstacle for bicycle sales during the war was the War Production Board’s (WPB) decision to ration bicycle production and sales beginning in March, 1942. Manufacturers were first limited to producing only “two types of lightweight models” (one for adult men and one for women). They were subsequently banned from selling, shipping, delivering, or transferring bicycles all together until further notice.\textsuperscript{12} The lightweight models were dubbed “Victory” models and the Office of Price Administration (OPA) ordered prices set “between $30 and $40.”\textsuperscript{13} A WPB official explained, “The order was issued because of the terrific rate at which bicycles have been going to people who don’t need them, with too few going to people like defense workers who have to have them or soon will need them.”\textsuperscript{14} This was a blow to the bicycle industry, which was “expected to come into its own as a result of conversion of the auto industry to war production and the severe rationing of tires.”\textsuperscript{15}

The WPB’s announcement of the coming curtailment of bicycle sales actually worked in the bicycle industry’s favor momentarily as it instigated a run on bicycles. In Illinois, bicycle sales for January 1942 were double that of January 1941. The state finance director expected sales figures for February to show even bigger gains due to “anticipation of this week’s [March 15] order of the War Production board cutting the bicycle industry’s 1942 output to 42 per cent of the 1941 volume.”\textsuperscript{16} This boom in sales—resulting from anticipation of governmental restrictions—was common among

\textsuperscript{12} William Strand “Adult Bicycles Sales Banned; Plan Rationing” \textit{Chicago Tribune}, April 3, 1942.
\textsuperscript{13} “OPA Prepares to Put Bicycles on Ration List” \textit{Chicago Tribune}, May 17, 1942.
\textsuperscript{14} William Strand “Adult Bicycles Sales Banned; Plan Rationing” \textit{Chicago Tribune}, April 3, 1942.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} “Bicycles Sales Soar in Advance of Steep Curb on Production” \textit{Chicago Tribune}, March 15, 1942.
many other consumer goods.\textsuperscript{17} Even the temporary increase of sales in anticipation of the curb on production, however, was not enough to bankroll the months of forcibly curtailed sales that lay ahead for the bicycle industry.

The restrictions on production of adult bicycles was problematic, but not nearly as detrimental for bicycle sales as the ordered cease of production of junior models. During the previous year, 85 per cent of the 1,800,000 bicycles produced were for juveniles.\textsuperscript{18} Even though war-time restrictions on production would reduce sales to a tenth of what they were before the U.S. entered the war, this was more of a temporary pause in the growth of the industry rather than an event whose effects were insurmountable. Even if bicycle and bicycle parts manufacturers were forced to reduce their output, their doors were not closed. Like auto, sewing machine, and other manufacturers during the era, bicycle producers, such as the Arnold, Schwinn and Company, retooled to aid the war effort.

By 1944, Schwinn had manufactured and delivered “217 different items to various Army, Navy and Air Corps Departments.”\textsuperscript{19} This was not the first time bicycle manufacturers re-tooled for a war effort. Schwinn had “served its country” before in World War I, producing training plane motors, bomber plane parts and many other accessories.\textsuperscript{20} Schwinn used this detail, as well as the fact that the company was awarded the Navy’s E for excellence award, to promote Schwinn as a valuable and patriotic contributor to the American way of life. Schwinn’s publication, \textit{Fifty Years of Schwinn...}

\textsuperscript{17} United States, \textit{Victory: Official Weekly Bulletin of the Office of War Information}, January 13, 1942, 4. \textit{Victory} details stories of how there were “runs” on items that were merely rumored to face curtailment such as car batteries and spark plugs.


\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
Built Bicycles: The Story of the Bicycle and Its Contributions to Our Way of Life—an advertisement for Schwinn that masqueraded as a history of the bicycle—told readers about its service to the country.

While patting itself on the back for its contribution to the war effort, Schwinn also took a moment to note that, in spite of its production of munitions and other military goods, the busy schedule had not prevented the company from spending “every spare moment and many an evening into the night” planning a “gigantic postwar program.” Schwinn planned to produce the largest amount of “new and modern equipment . . . in its history” once the war was over.21 It would take a few years, but Schwinn was confident that it would get back on track. It promised bigger and better things in the post war era. The war curbed but did not put an end to bicycle usage or sales. Even in 1944, the Yosemite National Park recorded over 100,000 hours of bicycle rentals.22 Once the war was over, the industry would attempt to and succeed at picking things up where they left off.

Getting back to pre-war production levels did, however, take some time to achieve. Trade journals gave merchants ideas on things they could do to keep consumers excited about bicycles while manufacturers struggled to meet demand. One article began, “Despite the recent lifting of restrictions by the WPB, the manufacture of juvenile wheel goods and toys has not been able to resume on a scale sufficiently large to supply even a small portion of the needs of retail establishments for the coming Christmas season.”23 The short supply required retailers to stage cycling events to remind young and old that

21 Ibid., 79.
22 Ibid., 90.
23 “Keeping Youngsters Wheel Minded When Stocks of Juvenile Wheel Goods are Scarce” American Bicyclist and Motorcyclist, October, 1945, 32.
“he [the dealer] is the wheel goods expert and will supply their needs as soon as possible.” Manufacturers were just as panicked about supply keeping up with demand as were dealers and retailers.

Arnold, Schwinn & Company made excuses in their advertisements, thanking bicycle retailers for their patience and assuring them they were working hard to return their factories back to pre-war status. In one advertisement for the Christmas season to be run in American Bicyclist and Motorcyclist Frank Schwinn noted that the copy would read, “With the Season’s Greetings, we extend our sincere thanks to our many loyal customers for their patience with our reconversion problems. Already our production has reached impressive proportions and we will soon ship Schwinn Built Bicycles in satisfactory quantities. And all of them will go to our loyal, pre-war accounts.”

Though Schwinn and other members of the bicycle and parts manufacturing industry were unable to return immediately to pre-war production and sales levels, which were around the one million mark, 1945 was a significantly better year than 1944—with an output of 544,721 up from 148,799 in 1944. By 1946, sales were back to pre-war levels, 1,664,327 and breaking records in 1947 and 1948 with well over 2.5 million units consumed in the U.S. market.

Manufacturers worked to satisfy demands for bicycles they were unable to meet during the war and bicycle consumption rose steadily until 1949, when numbers dropped from 2.7 million to 1.4 million. After 1949, sales came back to the two million mark and

24 Ibid.
rose steadily each year from then on.\textsuperscript{27} A similar trend occurred among various industries and 1948 saw the highest amount of private investment for the years 1946-49, while 1949 saw somewhat of a recession.\textsuperscript{28} As bicycle sales got back on track—meeting and ultimately exceeding pre-war levels—many of the marketing tactics and design trends remained the same. The focus on juveniles was maintained and in many ways even escalated as bicycles and childhood in America became as inextricably linked as automobile ownership was to achieving ideals of adult masculinity.

Manufacturers, such as Arnold, Schwinn and Company continued to market children’s bicycles to parents, running advertisements in the pages of \textit{Life} or \textit{Popular Mechanics} focusing heavily on the Christmas season. An advertisement for Schwinn in \textit{Life} appealed to parents with a drawing of a boy and girl’s excited faces as they came down the stairs and saw a bicycle by the tree on Christmas morning. The copy read, “See their faces light up when it’s a real, honest-to-goodness Schwinn-Built waiting beside their Christmas tree.”\textsuperscript{29} Schwinn offered parents a “safe bike” that could “bring young hearts the zest of motion, while the wind stings their cheeks rose-red and their young legs grow more sturdy with every pedal-turn.”\textsuperscript{30} Schwinn would become a dominant force in the bicycle industry by the 1950s, especially among manufacturers. The company did so well during this era that its manufacturing facilities produced one quarter of all bicycles sold in the United States by 1951.\textsuperscript{31}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{28} Harold G. Vatter, \textit{The U.S. Economy in the 1950s: An Economic History} (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1963), 64-7. Vatter describes 1949 as a year of recession, part of a “pre-Korean slump.”
\textsuperscript{29} Arnold, Schwinn and Company, “The Gift Nearest their Hearts” \textit{Life} (December 1, 1941): 88.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
\end{footnotesize}
Growing legs to become “more sturdy” shows how Schwinn promoted bicycles as a means to prepare boys for manhood. At the same time, the fact that the bicycle was seen as a means to gradually ease one into manhood is also apparent in attempts to create a market for bicycles among soldiers returning from war. For veterans of war, the bicycle was a mode of reaffirming and rehabilitating their masculinity, particularly in the case of those returning from the war with injuries. Under a headline proclaiming, “The Bicycle’s Aid to Rehabilitation of Our Wounded Veterans” readers were informed of the bicycles’ role, and that of the public, in aiding wounded soldiers’ recovery. “The readjustment and happiness of wounded soldiers and sailors with physical disabilities or nervous manifestations will depend in large measure on the way their families and friends and the public at large behave toward them.”

The article read more like a public service announcement on the problems wounded veterans could possibly encounter when returning to life in the U.S. Using information from the Office of War Information, it told readers that a “formerly able-bodied” man who returned home injured was “almost certain to be emotionally disturbed . . . [i]n his disturbed state the man has his own idea of what a cripple is—an idea which all too often approaches a popular conception arising from ignorance. A soldier who finds himself without legs, for example, may well think of himself in the situation of the legless beggar he used to see pushing himself along on a little cart on the crowded sidewalks downtown and he may think that is how others think of him, too.”

The physical and mental experiences of war could damage, even destroy,

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33 Ibid.
one’s masculinity if the veteran and his community did not work to overcome sacrifices of the body and the psychological impact of war.\textsuperscript{34}

Two pictures accompanied the article, one with able-bodied soldiers who had returned home enjoying a leisurely group ride on their bikes along with a few healthy young women—prospective mates. The other photo pictured a solemn looking man straddling a bicycle that had been converted to remain stationary, while another man tinkered with the design. The caption reads, “In Algiers, Yankee ingenuity fashioned this bicycle trainer. . . . It is used for rehabilitation as a leg and shoulder conditioner.”\textsuperscript{35} This was part of the work done by nurses and physicians to restore self-confidence as well as physical health, both of which were requisites of masculinity. This shows a negotiation of ideals promoted by the cult of athleticism, which held that the traumas of war could be conquered through exercise, a degree of forgetfulness and a modern, psychological based understanding of male identity, which acknowledged the mental strain of war and the benefits of being attuned to those side-effects.\textsuperscript{36} Just as the bicycle was an initiating device that could aid the transformation from juvenile male into adult male, it could also rehabilitate and restore manhood for wounded veterans insecure about their masculinity. In both instances, the bicycle operated as a step toward, rather than a means to achieve, manhood.

As it turned out, World War II was more of a speed bump for the bicycle industry than a devastating set back. The strict limitations on production put in place by the War Production Board (WPB) certainly dampened spirits, but many manufacturers such as

\textsuperscript{34} For a discussion of the destruction of masculinity caused by World War I, see: Karen Petrone, The Great War in Russian Memory (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011): 75-126.
\textsuperscript{35} “The Bicycles’ Aid to Rehabilitation of Our Wounded Veterans” American Bicyclist and Motorcyclist, April, 1945, 20.
Schwinn and Bendix were able to push through the war years with their factories in full force, manufacturing parts and accessories for military use. Economic historian Harold Vatter argues that American business in general emerged from the war with “large accumulated reserves of liquid assets, elaborate postwar plans, and a relatively reduced burden of debt charges.”\(^37\) This was certainly true for members of the bicycle industry. The pause provided a moment of reflection and breathing room for planning, marketing, and production strategies after the war. Bicycle production increased drastically immediately after World War II but still there was panic that American companies would not be able to produce enough bicycles to meet demand and might therefore, open up room for imports. The biggest fear was that they would not be able to compete or meet foreign producers’ prices due to disparities in workers’ wages in European countries and U.S.

In spite of those fears, the post-war period would prove to be very good for the American bicycle industry. That success came through a continued focused on boys. Cultural trends, such as the growth in suburbanization, home-building and consumption of automobiles, televisions, children’s clothing, and toys would all continue to increase dramatically throughout the 1950s and early 1960s.\(^38\) In the process, design trends developed across various industries. For instance, the sophisticated but functionless embellishments incorporated into bicycle design were also apparent among several other consumer items. The historian James Patterson writes, “Automotive design—at its most flamboyant from 1955 to the early 1960s—expressed the dynamic and materialistic mood


of the era. The designs deliberately recalled lines of jet planes and generated a streamlined, futurist feeling—one that was emulated in many other products, from toasters to garden furniture to new kitchens that featured all manner of sleekly crafted electrical conveniences.”

Automobile sales soared during the postwar economic boom. Around 49.3 million cars were registered at the beginning of the 1940s and 73.8 million were registered by the decade’s end. “By 1960 nearly 80 percent of American families had at least one car, and 15 percent had two or more.” This helped keep the tactic of promoting the bicycle as an item that prepared children for adulthood (driving in particular) firmly intact. In his history of children at play, Howard Chudacoff argues that “in the minds of experts, play was not the opposite of work; rather, it should be a productive activity through which a child rehearsed for modern adulthood by following the guidance of wise, rational adults.”

This attitude was apparent in bicycle promotional materials including safety films for children produced by private production companies.

One such film, Drive Your Bicycle, suggested that if children thought about and drove their bicycle like a car, they would be safer and better prepared to drive an actual car when they reached the appropriate age. A boy in the film tells a parent that he and his friends have been learning bicycle safety at school. Regarding the weekly class, he says, “We call it learning to drive our bikes. Coach says we have to follow all the same traffic regulations as the cars, so that if we learn all the regulations by driving our bikes we’ll be

39 Patterson, Grand Expectations, 317.
41 Patterson, Grand Expectations, 316.
ready to drive a car when we’re old enough.”43 Such materials showed that boys could ride and truly enjoy their bicycle while simultaneously day-dreaming about being old enough to drive a car. They also showed how pervasive the idea that bicycles were merely preparation for cars had become.

Advertisements and calls for adults to provide bicycles for children also became more pervasive, coming from individuals and organizations that were seemingly unconnected to the bicycle industry. An article titled, “Hank Wants a Bicycle for Paper Route,” made appeals through attempts to capitalize on the charitable spirit of readers. It alerted them about a young boy in need who had recently learned to ride a borrowed bicycle and desperately wanted one of his own so that he could start a paper route. The article assured readers, “It is good to foster self-reliance in a youngster, and we hope that a bicycle may be located for Hank in order that he might partake of riding fun with other kids and experience his initial business venture, which looms so large on his boyish horizon.”44 This article was not only about charity and benevolent paternalism, it was also an encouragement for adults to train children to be good capitalists and to provide opportunities for socialization with their peers—free from parental supervision.

Another article titled, “Give Teen-Age Child a Little Independence,” explained that the bicycle was a natural means of initiating boys into manhood. It claimed, “This reaching out for new fields to conquer is natural and normal, and we should help our boys to satisfy reasonable desires.”45 Still, being careful not to totally alienate females the article continued, “Boys, and girls, too, need freedom to be on their own, to do things for

43 The Sullivan Company, Drive Your Bicycle 1954. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fDm6jiQz5BY.
themselves. The sense of liberty and responsibility for one's own actions that goes with it are valuable experiences. Notions of liberty were stressed—not by coincidence—in the years around World War II, as America developed a heightened spirit of patriotism and an even greater desire to grant others that same freedom and liberty that they experienced themselves.

Heavy bicycle designs of the 1930s would also continue after World War II but manufacturers took juvenile marketing a step further with designs that could be incorporated into play for younger/smaller children more easily. The 1950 toy fair included exhibits from dozens of bicycle manufacturing companies. There were bicycles for “every age group . . . both adult and juvenile, balloon tired and tank models.” One exhibit by the D.P. Harris Hardware and manufacturing company featured their new ‘Hopalong Cassidy’ bicycle, which included “shootin’ irons, genuine leather holster and fringe, jewels, studs and many other authentic ‘Hoppy’ features.” The 1930s-50s saw the rapid expansion of childhood consumerism and juvenile mass media. By 1950, the bicycle industry, television, radio, and children’s magazines all worked in tandem to encourage a mutually beneficial ideal of juvenile masculinity. The Hopalong Cassidy series and similarly designed bicycles romanticized and glorified the cowboy of the American West. It was never too early for young males to begin dreaming about taming the wild and getting back to the rugged individualism of their forefathers. Other juvenile models included a cowboy motif as well. Along with capguns and holsters, the Gene Autry model by Monark included a “rodeo brown” finish, rhinestones and a plastic horse’s head affixed to the head tube. The 1953 Juvenile Ranger produced by the Meade

46 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
Cycle Company also included capguns, as well as a saddle blanket, saddle bags and embellishments to make the seat look more like a horse’s saddle. The bicycle was just as necessary to aspiring masculine archetypes as a slingshot or air rifle. Used together, boys were more than prepared to settle their suburban landscape.

Bicycle shops continued to alter their tactics as well. Carl Hutchinson of the Hawthorne Cycle Co. wrote, “In the 15 years in the bicycle and juvenile wheel goods business . . . we have found that our best bet is the boy. The average boy is more careful of his obligations than are the majority of adults, and we treat him with the same consideration.”49 Hutchinson claimed that nearly fifty percent of his sales were made to boys who used their bicycles for transportation to and from school and often to carry newspapers. Tactically, he admitted, “as the holiday season approaches we give more space to our toys and juvenile wheel goods, a larger corner window being devoted to

same. Only at the Christmas season are dolls carried, as we wish to keep the stock predominantly masculine.”

Store owners such as Hutchinson did not want to confuse the masculinity of boys’ bicycles by selling them next to dolls and girls’ toys. Similarly, designs made sure to keep a firm line drawn between girls’ and boys’ models. A study by the Cleveland welding company found that “there was a ‘class’ appeal in the new models that broadened the spread between the deluxe and competitive lines. . . .”

Their study focused on rider psychology, especially that of juveniles. They found that the illusion of mass without weight and “complete contrast” between male and female models—attained through the use of dark colors for men's bikes and light feminine colors for the ladies—were two important aspects of rider psychology.

The bicycle industry’s decision to focus on juvenile consumers was rewarded during the baby boom in the post war period. A B.F. Goodrich catalog claimed that the “huge bicycle and wheel goods market” was growing even more because of the increased birth rate.

Goodrich cited the U.S. Office of vital statistics to specify that 1953 was a good year for potential sales with a birth rate of 3,909,000, which exceeded previous years. With the national birthrate over 3,500,000 every year since 1947 and estimated at 4,000,000 for 1954, their math forecasted that “in the ten years ending in 1960, the number of children in the 5-to-14 age group is expected to increase to 35.6 million, a gain of 45 per cent over 1950.” The note on increasing birth rates was accompanied with a

50 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
54 Ibid., 1. See Also: Patterson, Grand Expectations, 314. The population increase of over 29 million people from 1950 to 1960 was and is the largest American history. Harold G. Vatter, The U.S. Economy in the 1950s (New York: WW Norton & Company, 1963), 8-9. Vatter points out that by 1956 the rate of population growth had begun to slow.
reminder that children’s models were good for bicycle retailers because they meant a good profit and high turnover in sales—undoubtedly because children were notoriously rough with their toys and because they simply outgrew them. B.F. Goodrich also suggested that the purchase of bicycles for children was becoming more commonplace, not necessarily just a Christmas gift, although the company did admit that the last quarter of the year was the best for sales. Still, spring and summer sales had become even more reliable.

As popular forms of entertainment for children and juveniles proliferated, American adults became increasingly concerned with what their children were thinking and doing. Adults believed those very same forms of entertainment were responsible for instilling vices rather than virtues in their children. Of particular concern was juvenile delinquency. Social scientists, intellectuals, religious officials, government officials, and law enforcement officials all testified before a Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency claiming, “Mass media stood between parent and child. Consequently, parents could no longer impress their value systems on children who were influenced as much by a new peer culture spread by comic books, radio, movies, and television, as by their elders.”

Senator Robert C. Hendrickson, chairman of the subcommittee, claimed there was a “30 percent increase” in juvenile delinquency from 1948 to 1953. Psychiatrist Fredric Wertham’s controversial best-seller, Seduction of the Innocent, which blamed juvenile delinquency and anti-social behavior on comic books, heightened alarms. While the concern with juvenile delinquency was certainly more palpable in the postwar period than

it had been in the years leading up to the war, James Gilbert argues adults’ fears about juveniles were not new, but the source of influence was. In his study of fears of juvenile delinquency, Gilbert contends that such concerns were episodic—using the fear of the “flaming youth” of the 1920s as an example. Still, he argues the concerns with mass culture of the 1950s were “protracted and perhaps more universal and intense than at earlier periods.”

Mass culture was not unique to juveniles, as televisions, radios, and a rising mail-order industry along with a growing number of chain stores, affected the choices, sensibilities, and mannerisms of adults as well. While many were busy “buying in” some observers saw the rise of consumerism in America as problematic. Most notably, the “Beat Generation” writers expressed their distaste with consumer society and conformity among Americans. Allen Ginsberg voiced disdain for consumerism as a great evil called “Moloch” in 1954 and conformity was openly rejected in Jack Keroac’s novel, *On The Road in 1951.*

While American adults readily consumed television and radio, they were simultaneously critical of the media. They believed these new forms of mass culture “deprived adolescents of their innocence, their childhood, and their independence.”

Much like the bicycle industry, which had taken a more heavy-handed approach at marketing its products to kids during the Depression Era, many other industries were now doing the same. Steven Mintz argues that comic books, movie serials directed at juveniles, radio programs and new toys designed specifically for children all were the direct result of “financially hard-pressed marketers and manufacturers [who] target[ed]
children as independent consumers.”

He posits that these efforts created a new age category, the teenager—a word that was published for the first time in a September 1941 issue of *Popular Science.* Adults were wary of new forms of mass media not only because they “sparked children’s fantasies and consumerism in ways that had not existed previously” but also because they “included role models of spunky children challenging and outwitting naïve or wicked adults.” Parents could embrace and even attempt to foster a spirit of independence in their children but this was tempered by fears of raising an anti-authoritarian misfit.

The effort to ebb the tide of comic books waged by Senator Hendrickson and others was somewhat late in coming and it is questionable whether it had any effect at all. As early as 1947, there was evidence that the comic book industry was over-reaching and the popularity of their product was beginning to fizzle—even without public outcry over juvenile delinquency. Frank Schwinn brought this to the attention of his advertising department, citing a *Wall Street Journal* article that reported comic book sales were slumping and the price of production rising. Schwinn, addressing his employees over forty years before the publication of James Burkhart Gilbert’s argument, also recognized that the controversy surrounding comics was not new. Regardless of a belief that comic’s popularity would be short-lived, Schwinn advocated using them for what they were worth. He wrote, “Many things such as the comic book are ephemeral. Witness the dime novel of a generation or two ago. I believe that because of the marked similarity between

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62 Ibid., 236 and 252.
63 Chudacoff, *Children at Play*, 122.
64 Frank W. Schwinn to Mr. Berry, Mr. Stoeffhaus, and Mr. Fritz, July 18, 1947, Inter-office notes to Advertising Department from Frank W. Schwinn, April 1943-December 1948, Bicycle Museum of America, New Bremen, Ohio.
the dime novel and the comic book, it is reasonable to assume that their popularity cycles will be similar but must be adjusted for.”\textsuperscript{65} After all, Schwinn was a leader in an industry which had first-hand experience with the instability of consumer fads. He saw the opportunity and limitations they offered.

The bicycle industry made a continual effort to react to, anticipate, or even encourage, social and cultural alterations that would benefit sales of their product. The rise of comic books and children’s programs on the radio and television would be no different. These resources not only provided a convenient and effective means of promoting bicycles to children, they also created a perceived problem that bicycles could solve. In effect, these cultural shifts, the rise in marketing to children that helped expand childhood consumerism and the fears that consumption of these new goods led to juvenile delinquency affected the way the bicycle industry would think about and market their product. This put the bicycle industry in the curious position of promoting their product in the very same sources of media that supposedly led to juvenile delinquency, something a bicycle could allegedly curb. That is not to say that the industry opposed comic books or children’s programming, to do so would have made them an opponent of the very things juveniles enjoyed. A certain line had to be toed in which bicycles could be promoted to parents as an alternative to comic book reading for their children but simultaneously to children as something that could help them live out their fantasies of being the crime fighting heroes of the very same comics their parents did not want them reading. Essentially, the industry needed to promote bicycles as a means of independence for children and supervision for adults. Numerous companies catering to child consumers addressed these competing interests. Lisa Jacobson argues that radio

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.
clubs like Ovaltine’s Little Orphan Annie’s Secret Circle and Post Toastie’s Inspector Post Junior Detective Corps., were popular because they successfully “straddled two distinct consumer constituencies—parents and children—ultimately hoping to win over children without sacrificing parental goodwill.”

One way to negotiate those demands was through encouraging the creation of clubs and group activities. Frank Schwinn saw the rising fears of juvenile delinquency and the resulting growth of clubs as an opportunity to sell more bikes. He told a Schwinn executive, “There is a lot stirring in the way of boys’ clubs and activities to help overcome the juvenile delinquency going on in our locality. . . . I think it would be fair to contribute to this movement in light of the possible publicity and business opportunity involved.” Schwinn was most likely talking specifically about programs led by the Bicycle Institute of America, which was one of the more vocal groups leading the charge in promoting bicycles as a curative of juvenile delinquency. He saw this as an opportunity to satisfy perceived desires of both child and parent. A bicycle club could give a child the feeling of independence while also ensuring there would be a responsible party to supervise.

Much like earlier trade groups such as the Directorate and Cycle Trades of America, the Bicycle Institute of America (BIA) consisted of retailers, manufacturers, and distributors of bicycles and parts in America. In the interest of promoting bicycle riding, the BIA not only bought advertising in children’s magazines, it also published books and materials to create an interest in organizing and perpetuating bicycle clubs for kids. It promoted clubs in a manner that stressed the benefits of bicycling for juveniles

66 Jacobson, Raising Consumers, 183-4.
67 Frank W. Schwinn to Mr. Fritz, August 24, 1948, Inter-office notes to Advertising Department from Frank W. Schwinn, April 1943-December 1948, Bicycle Museum of America, New Bremen, Ohio.
arguing bicycle clubs could, add “vigor, vitality, and happiness” to communities by “providing an outlet for fraternization, social contacts and stimulating activities that result in lasting friends and boost the morale of its members.” The BIA believed the fraternal bonds forged via bicycle were extremely important to the bicycle’s future success. In its opinion, the bicycle would continue to grow in popularity because cyclists represented “sports enthusiasts who have achieved a common source of happiness. They have found bicycling an inexpensive form of transportation recreation—a valuable way to enjoy their spare time—a means of improving their physical condition [and] a carefree, happy way of getting closer to nature.” This was a continuance of bicycle promotions that predated World War II, The Great Depression, and even the move to juvenile consumers. Advertisements focusing on men of the 1880s and 1890s also celebrated the bicycle as a means to get back to nature. Cyclists of the 1950s apparently also needed a practical and inexpensive means of escaping the “inevitable pressures of everyday life.” Instead of simply providing health and enjoyment for individuals, however, the bicycle of 1950 also allegedly strengthened communities.

In other ways, the BIA was also reactive to the cultural milieu of the post war era. It continued old appeals, ones it believed worked in the past and were successful among various demographics, yet it also refined some of the language used, particularly in appeals made to parents. It was quick to offer bicycles as the remedy for a culture that adults feared may be spinning out of control. Childhood, with its comic books and television programming seemed far different for their children than what they experienced growing up. The bicycle, however, offered a means to hold onto old

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68 Bicycle Institute of America, Bicycle Riding Clubs (Bicycle Institute of America: New York, 1950), 4-5.
69 Ibid., 4.
70 Bicycle Institute of America, Bicycle Riding Clubs (Bicycle Institute of America: New York, 1950), 4.
traditions. Those parents who had bicycles during childhood could ensure that their children had the same experiences. For those who grew up too poor for their own parents to afford a bicycle, buying one for their own child signified social mobility just as important as owning their own car. By the 1950s, the bicycle was an undeniably fundamental part of the American child’s life experience, but the BIA promoted it as even more.

With the memory of war still fresh on Americans’ minds, the bicycle industry continued to link bicycles and childhood with nationalistic ideals. In club promotional materials, the BIA reminded readers, specifically those interested in starting cycling clubs, that clubs were indeed important not only to ensure well-behaved children but also national health and it was a duty of responsible citizens to promote such groups. “In our nation today” it implored, “it is not sufficient for any organization to confine itself to its own interests and activities. The responsibility to the community, particularly to its younger members, is an unfailing mark of responsible citizenship and leadership.”

Attempting to promote the bicycle as a deterrent to the prospect of misled youth, the BIA continued, “The good health and fun derived from bike riding is a perfect antidote to crime and juvenile delinquency. It is a real contribution to the achievement of the American ideal—better, healthier and happier young people who make tomorrow’s citizens and help to build a greater country for all to live in.”

The bicycle, then, guaranteed individual and national health. In the hands of “young people” it was a symbol of America.

71 Bicycle Institute of America, Bicycle Riding Clubs (Bicycle Institute of America: New York, 1950), 57.
72 Ibid.
By the late 1950s, the BIA published booklets stating, “Many communities across the country have recognized the need for supervised teen-age activity and have formed clubs for this age group.”\textsuperscript{73} This was somewhat contradictory to other appeals aimed at parents encouraging them to give their child a little independence by buying them a bicycle. With the creation of bicycle clubs, however, parents could be more confident that their child would go on outings via bicycle without worrying that they would get into trouble or be in danger. The clubs would promote bike hikes, community picnics, and bicycle safety campaigns. With the creation of clubs, there was still a guise of teenagers’ full independence. The BIA cautioned adults interested in creating bicycle clubs that “Interest in Youth Fitness and bicycling, sparked from within the ranks of the youngsters themselves, can better build teen-age support than many other projects instigated and controlled by adults.”\textsuperscript{74} The institute recognized that a club founded by and run by adults for teen-agers would prove less appealing than an “authentic” club organized by teens.

This notion of supervision at a distance was the product of negotiations between desires to grant children independence and teaching them responsibility while at the same time, addressing real concerns about the preoccupations of juveniles and fears of delinquency. A letter from Frank Schwinn to one of his executives laid out ideas for such a program as early as 1947. Regarding a meeting with the BIA and other manufacturers in January, 1948 on the subject of “The Bicycle is an Implement for Fighting Juvenile Delinquency, providing Helpful Recreation and Amusement for Growing Children,”

\textsuperscript{73} Bicycle Institute of America, \textit{How Your Community Can Participate in a Youth Fitness Bicycle Program} (New York: Bicycle Institute of America, 1957). The date of this particular pamphlet is not known for sure. The New York Public Library has it catalogued as “195?” and there are no page numbers. It was probably at least 1957 or shortly thereafter since it specifically talks about President Eisenhower’s Conference on Youth Fitness, which occurred in early 1957.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
Frank Schwinn inquired about what kind of data could be gathered to support the claim. He explained to a Schwinn executive, Mr. Barry, that the BIA would enlist a group of men to “work with . . . the Youth Hostel, boy and girl scout groups, YMCA and . . . other national organizations working for the good of America Youth, to demonstrate that the bicycle is the ideal instrument for the furtherance of healthful and educational group activities for children. It is hoped by the concerted effort, if it can be had, of such groups and intelligent leadership, we can eventually institute suitable programs in our public grammar and high schools.” Naturally, if those hopes came to fruition it would be of considerable benefit to certain members of the bicycle industry. Bicycle programs in public grammar and high schools would almost guarantee an increase in bicycle sales and excitement about bikes. It could also potentially mean that schools, or school boosters, would purchase large orders of bicycles and equipment—just as they ordered equipment for other school athletic programs. While the BIA’s bicycle clubs generated a considerable amount of excitement among members of the industry, there were still some kinks to work out and some doubts to address regarding the effectiveness of using newer forms of mass media to promote their product.

The encouragement of parents to grant their teens a little more independence and for teens to seek adventure and health outdoors was exemplified by the growth of the hostelling movement. Scholastic magazine published an article on the virtues of hostelling as early as May of 1938. News of the Delta Kappa Gamma Society also published an article on the growing popularity of the American youth hostel movement.

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75 Frank W. Schwinn to Mr. Barry, November 13, 1947, Inter-office notes to Advertising Department from Frank W. Schwinn, April 1943-December 1948, Bicycle Museum of America, New Bremen, Ohio.
76 Ibid.
77 Roland C. Geist, Bicycling As a Hobby (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1940), 154.
attributing its genesis to 1934. By 1950, there was an organization known as the American Youth Hostels, Incorporated, which sponsored over 27 trips domestically and abroad as well as “hundreds of shorter trips . . . planned by local councils of the organization.” The trips could last up to ten weeks and were gaining notoriety among educators who believed hostelling was “an excellent supplement to a school curriculum. Academic courses have rarely provided for major periods of growth which transform a young person’s outlook from the petty and provincial to a lively concern for world affairs.” The American Youth Hostel trips were perceived as beneficial to American teens and those in their early twenties because it brought them together with others from different backgrounds. Accommodated in barns, cabins, and private homes, hostelling also allowed kids from larger cities and most likely a middle class background—because of the expenses and resources needed to go on such a trip—to see how other parts of the country lived.

Members of the bicycle industry had been excited about the prospects of the hostel movement among the youth and the implications it would have for their product from the onset. In 1938, The League of American Wheelmen spoke of the growth of the movement and tied it to a call for more cycling paths in the U.S. Others pointed out the growing popularity of hostels as well, citing the fact that there were 110 located along popular cycling and hiking routes as further proof of the symbiotic relationship that bicycles and hostels could enjoy. Taking long trips hiking or via bicycle and staying at hostels was encouraged as an activity for American youth because it helped instill many

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79 Ibid.
80 American Bicyclist and Motorcyclist vol. 34, no. 1, January, 1938, 35.
of the ideals that American adults hoped youth would embrace. Not only could the
experience help them learn to get along with others from different backgrounds, it also
provided the physical activity and adventure that could help them mature physically and
mentally. These multi-week trips with their peers encouraged the kind of independence
and resourcefulness that were idealistic characteristics of the nation. Calls for parents’
support of the trips often incorporated a play on ideals of masculinity that were two-fold.
An article in the *Chicago Daily* calling on parents—but aimed specifically at fathers—to
grant teens independence provided a narrative that recounted a young boy asking his
parents for permission to go on a bicycle adventure for a few weeks. He would
undoubtedly stay at hostels during that time. When he asked his parents, “His mother's
heart missed a beat or two but she waited. She knew her husband always could handle
such things far better than she ever could, because he thinks before he answers, and she
usually speaks too soon.”82 Here, the goal was to directly appeal to patriarchy. In that
pursuit, it is understandable that advertisers would target fathers and reaffirm masculine
ideals of men as logical, level-headed patrons. Bicycle clubs and the hostel movement
were yet another way that the bicycle could transport a juvenile to adulthood. Even better,
it could do so in a manner that negotiated the child’s demands for independence from
their parents and parents’ desires to keep children under a watchful eye.

Contradictorily, while promoting bicycles as a curative of the ills of mass culture,
the bicycle industry also used mass culture as a venue for its advertisements. Even
though Frank Schwinn expressed doubts about the continued popularity of comics he
advocated for using them. He claimed they were “the quickest and cheapest way to reach

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82 Gladys Huntington Bevans, "Give Teen-Age Child a Little Independence," *Chicago Daily Tribune*,
March 23, 1945, 21.
our customer.” Schwinn would continue to use comic books, but with scrutiny. By 1948, the company created its own comic, “The Schwinn Bicycle Comic Book.” Advertisements for their comic book appeared in general comics, with emphasis on the “Stories of death defying bicycle racing and stunting, history of the bicycle, how to ride, care for and adjust your bicycle” that could be found in the Schwinn comic. One of the first issues released in 1949 offered just that. On the cover was a drawing commemorating Alfred Letourneur’s promotional exploit of riding a modified Schwinn Paramount at 108.92 miles per hour (fig., 6.2). The smoke in the background, along with the leather cap and aviator goggles made Letourneur look like a jet pilot or even a superhero. Instead of flying in the sky, he flew along the ground on a Schwinn-built bicycle. Actual photos from the event show Letourneur without any kind of eye protection and the helmet he wore looked much more like a bicycle helmet, decidedly less sleek than a leather aviator’s cap.

83 Frank W. Schwinn to Mr. Berry, Mr. Stoeffhuas, and Mr. Fritz, July 18, 1947, Inter-office notes to Advertising Department from Frank W. Schwinn, April 1943-December 1948, Bicycle Museum of America, New Bremen, Ohio.
84 Frank W. Scwhinn to Mr. Bond, November 12, 1948, Inter-office notes to Advertising Department from Frank W. Schwinn, April 1943-December 1948, Bicycle Museum of America, New Bremen, Ohio.
By 1957, even the comic books about well-known super-heroes incorporated bicycles into their pages. As the bicycle was such an important part of the American juvenile experience it is little wonder that the writers of Batman created a parallel character named Batman Jones. Jones was a juvenile who dressed up like his hero, Batman, and answered the bat signal just as quickly, on his bicycle rather than in the Batmobile. Batman tried to discourage the juvenile imposter but was surprised to find that Batman Jones could fight crime even though he was, in Batman’s opinion, “too young” for such a thing. Eventually, Batman Jones gives up on crime fighting on his own when he develops an interest in collecting stamps—a comment on the fickleness of juvenile consumers that contradicted opinions among bicycle boosters that juvenile consumers were reliable.86 The fact that bicycles were so pervasive in the lives of young

Americans established a certain level of symbiosis between bicycles and comic books. Batman Jones allowed young readers to envision themselves helping superheroes fight crime and the fact that he did so on a bicycle would arouse a desire for their own bicycle, or possibly a newer model. Regardless of the origins of the idea for Batman Jones or the appearance of bicycles in other comics such as Archie, bicycles became a prevalent subject matter in their pages.\(^{87}\)

Of course, there were also outright advertisements by bicycle and parts manufactures included in the pages of comics and westerns, popular among juveniles. For instance, the American Octanator Corporation, manufacturer of the Gazda spring handlebar, boasted to

\(^{87}\) Bendix Corporation, “Archie Gets All the Brakes” in possession of Bicycle Museum of America.
merchants that its advertisements would reach 20 million people with spots in Captain Marvel, Captain Marvel Jr., Whiz Comics, Western Hero, Monte Hale Western, Rocky Lane Western, Tom Mix Western, Hopalong Cassidy, Nyoka, Bill Boyd Western, and Lash LaRue Western to name a few.\textsuperscript{88}

The bicycle industry would also use television and radio programs to promote their product, particularly to children, but some members expressed concerns about whether radio commercials would benefit their business in any way. In correspondence with Schwinn executive, Mr. Bond, Frank Schwinn ordered that he be publicly pessimistic about radio advertising. Regarding a correspondence between the Schwinn Company and Campbell-Ewald—the advertising firm that represented the Bicycle Institute of America and Cycle Trades of America—Frank Schwinn wanted Bond to be tight lipped. He told Bond, “With respect to their inquiry re our opinion of the value of mentioning of our product on radio programs, you will inform them that we too have no way of gauging this, do not believe we are getting our money’s worth, but are going along ‘in a small way’ in the hope that we will eventually be able to determine its value. Our present opinion is that we derive little, if any, benefit from it.”\textsuperscript{89} Other bicycle companies were curious as to whether the radio advertisements were beneficial and this is a primary reason why Schwinn wanted Bond to downplay radio’s effectiveness. Advertising agencies reported similar attempts to keep the effectiveness of radio advertising hushed across various industries. A J. Walter Thompson executive in 1930 claimed radio was so effective that, “We have had several cases of where our clients were

\textsuperscript{88} American Octanator Corporation, Letter to Dealers with enclosed leaflet in binder titled “Bicycle Manufacturer Catalogs, A-D” at the Bicycle Museum of America.

\textsuperscript{89} Frank W. Schwinn to Mr. Bond, November 20, 1948, Inter-office notes to Advertising Department from Frank W. Schwinn, April 1943-December 1948, Bicycle Museum of America, New Bremen, Ohio.
asked to go before meetings for example, to tell about the results of radio advertising and they have refused to do so because they did not want their competitors to know just how good it was . . . . Most everybody on the air does his best to keep the facts from getting to anybody in tangible form.”  

Frank Schwinn believed Campbell-Ewald, since it represented the BIA and was closely associated with many bicycle and parts manufacturers that Schwinn saw as competition, was “sympathetic with eastern manufacturers” and therefore, not to be trusted. These eastern manufacturers were New Departure, Morrow, Westfield Manufacturing, U.S. Rubber Co, Diamond Chain Company, and others, which Frank Schwinn believed to be very powerful and controlling of the bicycle industry. Even in spite of the growth of his own company and western manufactures, he wrote, “[their] control is still strong and its strength bases upon the fact that the industry could not operate; in fact, would be brought to a standstill if Diamond Chain and New Departure were suddenly eliminated.”

By the 1940s and 50s, the use of radio and subsequently television for bicycle marketing was seemingly effective. Soon, the bicycle industry would not simply use television and radio as a venue; it also employed the help of real television stars, not just comic books and puppets like Howdy Doody. Schwinn ran advertisements telling potential customers to write in for a free copy of their Cyclorama-Catalog, which included “full-color pictures of Hollywood stars and latest Schwinn-Built models.”

Frank Schwinn believed the incorporation of movie stars into bicycle advertisements was effective because a “movie star’s picture and name will stop the reader whereas just a

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91 Frank W. Schwinn to Mr. Bond, November 20, 1948, Inter-office notes to Advertising Department from Frank W. Schwinn, April 1943-December 1948, Bicycle Museum of America, New Bremen, Ohio.
bicycle ad would not. . . . [O]nce that attention was had some of it could be diverted to
the bicycle.” — Arnold, Schwinn and Company also ran advertisements in trade journals
telling dealers about their cyclorama campaign as proof that Schwinn was working hard
to market their brand and “provid[ing] the best in consumer advertising to bring the
customers to [dealers’] store[s].” — Frank Schwinn instructed that the copy should read,
“Already 350,000 (or whatever figure may be at that time) American boys have written to
us for a copy of the famous Schwinn cyclorama and we know that before the year is out,
well over half a million boys and girls will have. . . .”

The returns on their campaign were substantial. One of Schwinn’s executives
reported shipping over 384,000 ordered cycloramas between the months of June and
August of 1946 alone. Similar advertisements were placed in girls’ magazines, such as
American Girl and on television and radio programs directed at girls. Still, the marketing
directed at girls is less apparent and often couched in terms of good health, rather than
independence, fun, or adventure. There are countless publicity shots of movie stars on
bicycles from the 1930s-1950s in part because many of the larger Hollywood lots kept
“fleets of Schwins, Shelbys, Raleighs, and Rollfasts so its actors, writers and crew could
get from one giant soundstage to another. . . .” — A wide array of movies incorporated
bicycles into their storylines, often in ways that connected the bicycle to youthfulness,
young love, eccentricity, or comedic antics. In The Quiet Man, John Wayne and Maureen
O’Hara jump on a tandem bicycle to escape the confines of supervised courtship, making

93 Frank W. Schwinn to Mr. Barry, July 30, 1947, Inter-office notes to Advertising Department from Frank
W. Schwinn, April 1943-December 1948, Bicycle Museum of America, New Bremen, Ohio.
94 Frank W. Schwinn to Mr. Anderson, August 6, 1946, Inter-office notes to Advertising Department from
Frank W. Schwinn, April 1943-December 1948, Bicycle Museum of America, New Bremen, Ohio.
95 Ibid.
96 F.S. Anderson to Frank W. Schwinn, December 19, 1946, Inter-office notes to Advertising Department
from Frank W. Schwinn, April 1943-December 1948, Bicycle Museum of America, New Bremen, Ohio.
their way to the countryside where they share their first kiss.

It is also important to note that *The Quiet Man* was set in Ireland and in the film the bicycle represented a kind of foreign quaintness as well as young love. With movies such as, *Woman of the River,* *Athena,* and *Today We Live,* as well as popular movie stars ranging from Gary Cooper to Lauren Bacall employing bicycles while still exuding beauty, exuberance, and coolness, Hollywood undoubtedly shaped views of the bicycle—particularly among those who emulated celebrities.

Of course, the bicycle made appearances in countless television programs as well.

Instructing others in how to promote the bicycle on television, the Bicycle Institute of America told potential bicycle boosters, “Women’s shows will be interested in bike fashions and the advantages of cycling for health and figure control.” Schwinn compensated celebrities with a bicycle for their photo. They could choose between a continental or tandem model. This was a deal agreed upon with every artist that gave Schwinn a picture, not just the ones they chose to use in the cyclorama. Schwinn was tardy, however, in fulfilling their end of the agreement with some artists. Frank Schwinn instructed employees to ship all bikes as soon as possible and to “apologiz[e] for lateness of delivery, plead reconversion and material troubles and give assurance they got the first produced.”

Frank Schwinn preferred to use the image of celebrities to simply grab consumer’s attention, but there was also the potential to sell bicycles out of consumer desire to imitate the stars they idolized. This harkens back to the marketing ideas at the turn of the century, which argued that if the industry could merely get society women, i.e.

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100 Bicycle Institute of America, *How Your Community Can Participate in a Youth Fitness Bicycle Program* (New York: Bicycle Institute of America, 1950).
101 Frank W. Schwinn to Mr. Anderson, August 6, 1946, Inter-office notes to Advertising Department from Frank W. Schwinn, April 1943-December 1948, Bicycle Museum of America, New Bremen, Ohio.
stylish women and women of the upper class, to ride bicycles, all other women would follow suit. Similar sentiments were expressed regarding increasing sales among men. By the postwar period, however, with the rise of radio and television stars, influence on consumer opinion was more universal, less local, and less dependent on consumption patterns of the upper class.

Along with its emphasis on boys, the bicycle industry continued the trend of producing heavier bicycles with large balloon tires in the post-war era. These tires were thought to provide more comfort on various surfaces and to last longer. The bicycles, as well, were bulky partially because manufacturers believed children needed something sturdy that could take their abuse. Of course, the heavier frames were also preferable because they were cheaper to produce than were bicycles consisting of light-weight materials that required more sophisticated—and therefore costly—methods of engineering and welding. By the 1950s, however, it is evident that some consumers desired, or even preferred, a lighter style bicycle with narrower tires, many of which also included multiple gears. These bicycles were considerably more efficient and could go “fast” over varying gradients more easily than a bicycle with only one gear. In an answer to lagging sales of ladies’ and girls’ models, Frank Schwinn suggested a ladies model with 1.75 inch wide tires to associates. He believed it might be popular since “small tires at higher inflation pressures will provide less rolling resistance, which would be a factor in increasing popularity in ladies models.”

His suggestion reveals a belief that women were not cycling because it was perceived as too strenuous. It was also a step toward correcting the American trend of producing heavy and inefficient machines.

American consumers began referring to such bicycles with skinnier tires and multiple gears as English Style models, a description American bicycle manufacturers would also use in catalogs in the late 1950s. Others, such as Columbia, called them “American’ Lightweights,” once they began actually producing and selling that particular model. 103 Arnold, Schwinn and Company expanded their production and sales of lightweights during the first part of the 1950s as well. A six months sales comparison with the industry showed that Schwinn lost around 65 percent of lightweight sales, which was an improvement from the loss of 71 percent in 1952 and 82 percent in 1951. 104 The large super balloon tires first introduced by Schwinn in the 1930s had dominated the industry but now, in the face of competition from European companies, American manufacturers and tire producers were forced to accept that many American consumers preferred a smaller, harder tire because of its efficiency. To refuse to cede to consumer demand would mean losing as many as 85,000 sales out of a total of around 1 million in the span of six months. For Schwinn, which accounted for 194,904 of those sales, the piece of the pie that lightweights represented was too much to leave on the table. 105

Not only did American bicycle companies initially ignore this particular segment of the market—a segment that had been highlighted as early as the 1920s as a direction in which the industry needed to devote more attention—it also sought political help to make

bicycles imported from Europe more costly. Most notably, the Bicycle Manufacturers Association of America called on the U.S. Trade Commission in October 1951. Its request for an “escape-clause” was initially denied but reconsidered in 1955 after imports rose drastically. At that point, the Trade Commission recommended President Eisenhower raise the tariff on bicycles to 22.5 percent. Eisenhower would ultimately prove to be a valuable advocate for the bicycle industry during the 1950s, but it was not without some prodding. In this particular instance, he enacted a 50 percent increase in tariffs on imported bicycles, thus raising the duty from 11.25 percent to the Trade Commission’s recommendation of 22.5 percent. It was raised specifically to “protect American producers from ‘serious injury. . . resulting in part from tariff concessions.’”

Most of the bicycles imported came from Great Britain, West Germany, Austria, France, Belgium, Netherlands, and Luxembourg. The number of bikes imported reportedly “mushroomed from fewer than 20,000 units a year from 1947-49 to 963,000 in 1954 and they were estimated to be as high as 1,250,000 in 1955. In a memo to his associates, Arnold Schwinn lamented:

About 12 months ago, people began to awaken to the large difference in price between foreign and domestic cycles and began to buy them. Like a snowball rolling down hill, the trend grew as the lightweight type of foreign cycle increased in popularity with the youngsters. These cycles are now acceptable. We, in the business, are prone to delude ourselves with isolated reports and instances such as—Foreign cycles don’t stand up, dealers won’t repair, dealers overcharge for

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repair, dealers do not like them because of cut-rate competition, etc., etc. The phenomenal increase in the sales of imports attests to the fallacy of these delusions, and – The good makes of imports stand up as well as domestic cycles.\footnote{Frank W. Schwinn to Mr. Stoeffhaas, “Increase in Imports” April 8, 1955 at the Bicycle Museum of America New Bremen, Ohio in binder labeled Memos General, Models, Prices, Dating, Statistics, Legal, Franchise, Individual Customer Instructions from FWS 1955.}

Cause for the expansion of the U.S. market was pinned on the growing consumption of “large wheel light-weight bicycles” and the fact that “the domestic industry manufacture[d] almost no bicycles of [that] type.”\footnote{“President OK’s 50 Pct. Boost in Bike Tariffs” Toledo Blade, August 19, 1955.} The British bicycle industry in particular was “dismayed” by the announcement of the increased tariff because of the damage it would do to their businesses. H.M. Palin, the director of the British Cycle and Motorcycle Manufacturers Union, believed the potential impact very harmful for both economies. He commented, “The increased tariff is all the more regrettable because it will hinder the cycle industry’s efforts to earn dollars and so help to maintain the balance of payments between this country and the United States.”\footnote{Ibid.} This was a sticky issue for Eisenhower since he maintained, “this nation’s firmly rooted policy of seeking ever expanding levels of international trade and investment is in no respect altered by this decision.”\footnote{“Ike Orders Duty Hike on Foreign Bicycles” Rome News-Tribune, August 19, 1955.}

Arnold, Schwinn and Company, which had been aware of the implications of a fair trade policy on American bicycle manufactures, warned of the repercussions before the war in Europe had even subsided. It issued a petition, signed by employees stating, “It has been suggested that our Government may adopt a free trade policy postwar, and permit bicycles made by foreign workers, who are paid much lower wages, to come into this country without payment of duty. American bicycle factories and workers cannot
compete against those foreign manufactures and workers.”\textsuperscript{113} The Schwinn company compiled facts, figures, and other materials to “urge proper Government officials to protect the American manufacturers and the American workers against the importation of foreign bicycles and parts that have been manufactured under a lower wage scale and under lower standard of living than the American standard.”\textsuperscript{114} In 1954, Frank Schwinn complained about the effects of the policy of fair trade on the previous year’s sales. He qualified figures saying, “If we had not adopted fair trade, we also would have shown a gain this year, or at least no loss.”\textsuperscript{115} Schwinn was extremely concerned with how his company could continue to compete against both domestic and foreign competition.

On the subject of sales, Schwinn told marketing supervisor Ray Burch, “I’m not anxious to make any changes now, nor until we know whether Washington will give us a reprieve. If you have occasion to write the President, use the old Roman gladiator’s salute—‘Caesar, those about to die salute you.’”\textsuperscript{116} Just seven months later, Schwinn would have his reprieve. Eisenhower’s increased tariff on imports, however, may not have been as big as American bicycle manufactures had hoped. The President took a middle-of-the-road approach that was simultaneously not enough in American manufacturers’ opinion, yet too much in the opinion of foreign manufacturers. Eisenhower saw the increase in tariffs but his decision to scale back the amount of the increase suggested by the Tariff Commission as a compromise, one that would “assure

\textsuperscript{113} Arnold, Schwinn & Company, Photograph Release for Employees (December 31, 1944) At the Bicycle Museum of America, New Bremen, Ohio in binder titled “Experimental From FWS.”

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.


foreign manufactures of ‘an excellent competitive chance to share handsomely in our large and growing market for bicycles.’”\textsuperscript{117} While it may not have been as much of an increase as certain members of the bicycle industry and Tariff commission wanted, it undoubtedly helped to protect manufacturers from bankrupting themselves trying to compete with foreign manufactures.

The move to increase bike tariffs on imported bicycles was not the only time that Eisenhower would make headlines in a move that benefitted the American bicycle industry. The President was also important to the bicycle industry because he offered their marketing campaign a little more credibility when he echoed endorsements for cycling found in trade magazines and general advertisements for the public. In particular, he advocated the bicycle as a means of improving health, especially among the youth of America, a matter of concern that prompted him to call a conference on the physical fitness of the nation in 1954. American youth had recently tested poorly, 50 percent actually failed the “standard minimum muscular fitness tests which had been conducted among” the youth in the U.S. and abroad.\textsuperscript{118} In an interview, Eisenhower argued that the reason statistics on the strength and health of American children looked “very depressing” in contrast with those of other countries was not because of “any deliberate desire to be affluent and soft.” Instead, he explained, “American children ride buses to schools farther away than four to eight blocks, whereas European children walk or ride bicycles. [A phenomenon which,] he attributed . . . to parental fear of ‘so much traffic on


\textsuperscript{118} Bicycle Institute of America, \textit{How Your Community Can Participate in a Youth Fitness Bicycle Program} (New York: Bicycle Institute of America, 1950).
the roads.’”

Cycling to school was, no doubt, affected by parents’ fear of traffic more significantly than walking. Because a block is an urban unit of measurement, the settings where children lived four to eight blocks from school, of which the President spoke, were necessarily urban and therefore likely to have sidewalks to keep pedestrians safe from traffic. Those riding bicycles, on the other hand, were expected to share the street with automotive traffic.

The bicycle industry’s campaign to promote cycling as a safe activity for children, which had been ongoing since the 1930s, had yet to convince the public that it was indeed safe, but it had made some inroads. In areas where there were no bicycle paths, members of the President’s Council on Youth Fitness such as Dr. Shane MacCarthy, suggested that city streets that were lightly used on weekends could be blocked off to automotive traffic and designated as bike recreation areas. MacCarthy also proposed that “secondary roads, left practically untraveled because of new highway building programs, could be easily converted into protected trails for the exclusive use of cycle enthusiasts.”

Even though the genesis and construction of Eisenhower’s interstate highway system is explained as arising out of desires to transport military items across the U.S., the interstates also reduced the traffic burdens for smaller highways and thoroughfares. Inadvertently, the interstate system had the potential to increase cycling’s safety and therefore, popularity. Still, this development was not as beneficial as it would have been for the President to put more effort into creating bicycle paths separate from automobiles. Politicians and other influential figures tout the health benefits of cycling

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120 Bicycle Institute of America, How Your Community Can Participate in a Youth Fitness Bicycle Program (New York: Bicycle Institute of America, 1950).
but even if the public were persuaded, actually getting out and riding a bicycle on the streets was still too intimidating for many. Even Robert Moses, who had successfully created bicycle paths in New York before World War II, took steps to ensure the automobile would be king. To the detriment of even public transportation, Moses ordered bridges on the New York City parkways be built so low that busses could not travel beneath them, effectively barring everyone without their own car from getting into the city quickly or efficiently.  

Still, there were some that pushed for bicycle infrastructure. Eisenhower’s enthusiasm for cycling, at least in part, was attributable to Dr. Paul Dudley White, a cardiologist who treated the President after a heart attack. White told audiences, “A bike ride a day keeps the heart doctor away.” Dr. White admitted that for everyone to ride a bike to work every day might be a tall order, especially for those in cities like New York. Consequently, he petitioned leaders of Baltimore, Chicago, Boston, Richmond, Va., and San Francisco to make bicycle paths in parks and along roadways a priority. Dr. White appeared to get other politicians on board with his promotion of cycling. A picture included in the BIA’s booklet, Bike Fitness showed Dr. White and Chicago’s Mayor Daley riding a tandem bicycle together, White in front, concentrating and smiling while Mayor Daley looked carefree on the back (fig., 6.4). The photo was taken as part of the publicity at the opening of Chicago’s bicycle paths.

122 “Bike Rides Urged by Heart Doctor: White Also Says Alcohol and Diet May Have Effect on Coronary Attacks” New York Times, March 18, 1956.
123 Ibid.
124 Bicycle Institute of America, How Your Community Can Participate in a Youth Fitness Bicycle Program (New York: Bicycle Institute of America, 1950).
The BIA was ecstatic over endorsements from President Eisenhower and his doctor. It included a newspaper clipping inside the cover of Bike Fitness proclaiming, “Hey Kids! Ike’s Hep about Bicycles.”\textsuperscript{125} It also reported that when President Eisenhower obtained a report by the Citizen’s Advisory Committee on Youth Fitness from Vice President Nixon, “he stated that he would like to see more young Americans riding bicycles. He pointed out that in his travels through Europe he had noted the continuing popularity of this sport which probably accounted for the high physical fitness ratio of European youths.”\textsuperscript{126} Concerns about youth fitness were beneficial to the bicycle industry as a whole. The BIA played on ideas of nationalism saying, “Youth Fitness is National Fitness.” Their booklet pictured a bald eagle in flight against the backdrop of red, white, and blue.\textsuperscript{127}

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid.
Others were optimistic about the effects of Eisenhower’s support of cycling as well. The *New York Times* reported, “Trade sources expect bicycle sales soon to start pedaling at a very fast clip as a result of President Eisenhower’s interest in the sport.”

Even though the President had only endorsed cycling relatively recently, Steve Masters, president of Masters, Inc., claimed that his store had already experienced a 20 percent increase in sales over a two week period by January 13, 1957. Robert W. Kerr, vice president of the American Machine & Foundry (AMF), believed that sales were likely to rise. Referencing Dr. White’s endorsement of cycling the previous year, Kerr said, “Our experience in the past has been that praise of cycling from White House circles has been followed by an upsurge in demand for wheel goods.”

Even though manufacturers and members of the industry gave a lot of credit to the White House, sales were continuing a general trend of increasing each year after 1949, going from 1,451,685 to 2,625,554 in 1957. Aside from the political support, bicycle manufactures believed sales were increasing because of “the introduction by domestic producers of new, streamlined ‘middleweight’ bikes similar to the popular foreign ones. They added that the continuing trend to the suburbs and the opening of more and more facilities for safe cycling in cities and towns throughout the country had also spurred volume.”

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129 Ibid. This was based on sales over a two week period compared with sales from the same period the previous year.
130 Ibid.
131 Schwinn Bicycle Company, “U.S. Bicycle Market Statics—1895 to 1979” *Schwinn Reporter*, March 1, 1980. There were a few years in which sales decreased but never more than a few hundred thousand.
bicycle, which was introduced in 1955 reportedly accounted for 65 percent of “all domestic manufacturers’ sales” in 1956.  

While the President’s promotion of cycling was good for the American bicycle industry, it also had the effect of improving diplomatic relations with foreign countries, which had been strained by his decision to increase the tariff on imported bicycles. The Dutch were enthusiastic about Eisenhower’s support of cycling and reportedly saw “promise of better relations with the U.S.” as a result. Figures on bicycle ownership estimated there were approximately 500 bicycles for every 1,000 people and 25 cars per 1,000 in the Netherlands. Conversely, in 1957, there were 15.41 bicycles per 1,000 people in the U.S. and 326 cars per 1,000. As a country that consumed bicycles with great zeal, people of the Netherlands agreed whole-heartedly when Eisenhower spoke of the health benefits and could point to the fact that the life-expectancy in their country exceeded the U.S. as proof. Of course, there is a lot more that factors into a country’s life-expectancy than whether they ride bicycles or not. Still, Eisenhower pointed out an important way in which American culture was different from that of European countries. It is important to note, however, that Eisenhower promoted cycling as exercise, not necessarily as a practical form of transportation. Of course, to do so would be a possible cause for concern among members of the automotive industry. While the White House’s promotion of the bicycle was important and undoubtedly beneficial for the industry, it was not the sort of sea change regarding the image of the bicycle that was needed to get

133 Ibid.
134 Walter H. Waggoner, “Eisenhower’s Enthusiasm for Bicycling Meets Warm Response in the Netherlands” New York Times, January 3, 1957. The figures the article gives is “one [bicycle] for every two people” and “one car for every forty people.”
adults back on bikes. The President was not saying ride your bike and leave your car at home or buy a bike, not a car. He was saying, ride a bike for health, which maintained the youthful image of the bicycle as an implement best suited for leisure and/or strenuous work. At the same time, the interstate system he initiated, while potentially reducing traffic on smaller thoroughfares also made cars more practical.

The expectation that Americans would give up their car for a bike in the 1950s was far too much to ask and Eisenhower’s suggestion that the Netherlands was somewhat superior in terms of health because of their cycling culture was merely political maneuvering. Still, Arnold, Schwinn & Company, as well as other bicycles and parts manufacturers, had come a long way. Bicycle production and consumption would reach previously unattained heights shortly after World War II. Even though things were going well, some key members of the industry recognized that it needed to temper appeals to juveniles. In some cases, it needed to uncouple images of the bicycle and childhood all together.

The BIA was aware that the image of the bicycle as a consumer item was so closely associated with childhood that even older teenagers were likely to turn away. It believed the best way to repair the bicycle’s status as a child’s toy, was for adults, particularly parents, to take the bicycle more seriously. Believing that children were most influenced by their parents, the BIA suggested that parents take the whole family out for cycling excursions. Regarding the importance of setting a good example it said, “If parents think of the bicycle as a toy, only to be used by kiddies, a similar opinion will grow in the mind of the child. Some teenagers think of the bike as ‘kid stuff,’ and refuse to ride, while it is their age group which needs the exercise most. If parents participate in
family bike hikes, their example will convince the youngsters that cycling is an adult means of exercise and transportation.\textsuperscript{137} Simultaneously, while telling parents to take the bike a little more seriously and show their children that it was an adult means of exercise, the BIA and the bicycle industry as a whole, remained relatively focused on marketing bicycles to children. Booklets with titles like \textit{Bike Fun} were stuffed full of pictures, guides, and rules for games to play with bicycles. Even though members of the bicycle industry became somewhat aware of the drawbacks of marketing strategies that focused on children, they provided little evidence in their own materials that there was anything adult about the bicycle at all.\textsuperscript{138}

Arnold, Schwinn and Company ran a comic strip advertisement in the pages of various comics such as \textit{Wonder Woman}, \textit{Mutt & Jeff}, and \textit{Green Lantern} as early as 1945, attempting to demonstrate that the bicycle was not necessarily a toy. In the comic, a boy who is asked by a friend if his dad was going to buy him a bike replies, “Nope! Gee! You’d think I was asking for a toy instead ‘o somethin’ useful like a bike. . . .” The boy then goes to prove to his father just how useful a bicycle can be when he is able to use a friend’s bike to bring his dad the briefcase he forgot at home just before his train leaves the station.\textsuperscript{139} The ad was not trying to distance bicycles from youthfulness or contest the idea that bicycles were for kids. Rather, it was merely suggesting that kids could use their bicycles to help their parents. This was an old tactic that had been around since the 1910s as companies promoted bicycles as a means for children to run errands

\textsuperscript{137} Bicycle Institute of America, \textit{How Your Community Can Participate in a Youth Fitness Bicycle Program} (New York: Bicycle Institute of America, 1950).
\textsuperscript{138} See: Bicycle Institute of America, \textit{Bike Fun} (New York: The Institute, 1953); and Bicycle Institute of America, \textit{Bike Regulation in the Community; A Program for the Regulation of Bicycle Traffic, the Promotion of Safety Practices and the Elimination of Bicycle Thefts in the Community, Through the Adaption of a Municipal Ordinance to Register, License and Control All Bicycles} (New York: Bicycle Institute of America, 1951).
\textsuperscript{139} Pridmore and Hurd, \textit{Schwinn Bicycles}, 90.
for parents and useful for pharmacies, grocery stores, and even the Western Union in allowing young workers to deliver goods more quickly and efficiently. In the same vein, bicycle advertisements that appealed to social and culture ideals of boyhood incorporated similar themes as advertisements that appealed to manhood at the end of the nineteenth century.

Fears that scientific and technological advantages were robbing the nation of its vigor also harkened back to insecurities at the turn of the century, which led to the rise of muscular Christianity, the modern Olympic movement, the YMCA, and the Boy Scouts. As Suzanne Clark shows, “[T]he old stories of manliness, strength, courage, and the strenuous life in the West that Theodore Roosevelt had connected to the national future at the beginning of the century, in the heyday of literary realism and naturalism, did not go away.” Many of the tried and true advertising ploys used at the turn-of-the-century were still in use, although rehashed to reach a younger demographic in the 1940s and 50s. The focus on that particular demographic—which began in earnest by the late 1910s and reached crescendo by 1950—was both a saving grace for the bicycle industry regarding sales of juvenile models but also a hindrance for adult and utilitarian models.

World War II and its aftermath was beneficial for any consumer item that could be promoted as a curative to all the insecurities that war brought, particularly in terms of gendered ideals like vigor, and independence. Bicycle marketing easily stepped into that role. After all, bicycles had been promoted as a way to maintain vigor and experience

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140 Jacobson, Raising Consumers, 122.
141 Bicycle Institute of America, How Your Community Can Participate in a Youth Fitness Bicycle Program (New York: Bicycle Institute of America, 1950). Shane McCarthy, the executive director of the President’s Council on Youth Fitness wrote, “We must be realistically aware that while we enjoy our scientific and technological advantages, there is created an inevitable tendency to deprive us of needed physical activity.”
freedom of movement for over fifty years. Even in advertisements for children’s models, members of the bicycle industry linked their product to a heightened sense of nationalism and patriotism by incorporating gendered ideals. The bicycle could prepare boys for manhood and girls for a version of womanhood that men found attractive. Older children, boys in particular, could use their bicycles to become more independent and self-sufficient by going on multi-day excursions, staying at hostels, aiding in the war effort, or to create their own stream of revenue. In this manner, the bicycle not only led to independence but also instilled a spirit of capitalistic individualism that would mold him into an ideal American man. As the BIA would point out, the bicycle promoted vigor, vitality, fraternization and happiness. It helped juveniles achieve ideals of gender and class simultaneously. While making young boys stronger, it also kept them out of trouble—protecting them from the scourge of juvenile delinquency.

The bicycle was not only a tool for instilling masculine ideals it also had the ability to restore masculinity. For injured veterans returning from World War II, it was the perfect means of reintroducing one to their masculine, pre-war, state because of its ability to ease them back into manhood. The bicycle could be a tool for vigorous exercise or leisurely enjoyment; it was up to the rider to decide. To that end, promotional ads using the images of Hollywood celebrities and beautiful women encouraged women and young girls to take up the bicycle to keep their figure. All of this did much to secure the place of the bicycle in American society. As a symbol of American youth and exuberance, bicycle consumption not only stabilized, it saw dramatic gains in the hands of a booming population that was arguably more prosperous than it had ever been.¹⁴³

Economic prosperity among Americans in the 1950s was not only a boon to the bicycle industry, many other household and consumer goods were thriving. The automobile became even more emblematic of American-ness as car consumption grew exponentially after the War’s end. As a result, the bicycle industry seemed content to let their product remain an adolescent form of mobility. Its advertisements were largely unconcerned with the automotive industry. Aside from dispelling fears of cyclists’ safety in light of increased automotive traffic or describing bicycles in terms similar to automobiles, there was no sense that the bicycle industry even saw the automotive industry as a competitor by the 1950s. Once competing for the same business, bicycles and cars had become two completely different objects used for entirely different ends.

The trials and tribulations facing men during World War II and the Cold War era played a role in the way Americans idealized childhood. The bicycle—the most desired of all children’s commodities after World War II—was marketed in a manner that took advantage of concerns about American manhood, while at the same time heightening parent’s concern about their children’s choice of recreation. The bicycle was a quintessential part of the American experience in the post World War II era, but one that was most closely associated with developmental stages of life, and marketing suggested it was more important for boys than girls. As a tool that allowed boys to rehearse for manhood, bicycles were means of training individuals for business, driving, and an introduction to independence. Bicycles had become the birthright of nearly every

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144 In some instances, this was due, in part, to the fact that powerful members of the bicycle industry with the biggest advertising budgets were also tied to the automotive industry. Such was the case with the New Departure coaster brake company, which had been a member of the United Motors Corporation (a subsidiary of General Motors) since 1916.

American boy but that relationship was soon severed as the boy reached maturity. While riding a bicycle and then graduating to the automobile was a fundamental step in becoming a man, the bicycle could only prepare one for manhood, not confer it. Bicycle designs and the industry’s marketing strategies did little to overcome the stigma that bicycles were children’s toys. In fact, it fed into those ideals and helped affirm conceptions of mobility that have remained a fundamental aspect of American identity.
CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

By the late nineteenth century, ideals of nation were increasingly linked to consumption. Rather than defining themselves by what they produced, Americans began to define themselves by what they consumed. As automobile consumption grew, the United States became a nation of autoists. The bicycle’s changing status compounded this alteration. It became a means for children to prepare for adulthood with the understanding that once they grew into adults, they had also outgrown the bicycle. Understanding the shifts in bicycle marketing and consumption lends insights into Americans’ unique conceptions of gender and mobility. The story of cycling’s rise, fall, and resurgence in America offers an important lens for viewing broader alterations in American culture.

The severity of both the boom and bust had long-lasting effects on the bicycle industry. Cycling’s meteoric rise in popularity was a bonanza for the industry, leading many entrepreneurs to enter the trade and inspiring a false sense of optimism. Americans’ fascination with the bicycle, however, diminished with the same speed it had intensified. To be sure, changes in the American middle-class’s ideals of gender had a significant impact. Men turned to bicycles in the 1880s and 1890s in reaction to a growing belief that the industrialized city and new forms of labor that did not require physical exertion were making them effete and nervous—shells of the men who preceded them. The “cult of fitness” that came to pass—with its emphasis on living a strenuous

722 Andre Siegfried, “The Gulf Between,” Atlantic Monthly, 141 (March 1928):289-295. This argument is widely accepted at this point and has been reiterated by countless scholars over the years but Siegfried seems to be one of the first to point this out.
life in the fresh open air out-of-doors was of considerable benefit to the bicycle industry. The increasing ease of riding a bicycle, which came with the invention of the safety bicycle, the inclusion of pneumatic tires, and decreasing prices made cycling more accessible. These developments also blurred the lines of gender and class that cycling had demonstrated previously. In turn, they led to a middle-class exodus from cycling, but bicycle marketers were reluctant to respond. Throughout the first decade of the twentieth century, the bicycle industry continued to promote middle-class ideals of health. Instead of targeting the lower-classes directly, the industry held onto a belief that advertisements targeting the middle-class would also speak to laborers who wanted to emulate their social superiors.

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the bicycle industry waxed nostalgic about the prosperity of the “golden age,” with the hope that it could lead the way back to similar sales figures—of over one million units. One of the first cooperative efforts to stimulate bicycle sales was aptly named the Million Bicycles Committee in direct reference to the high water mark set during the boom. Many members of the industry, however, learned a lesson from the rise and fall during the 1890s. They led the charge not only to recover sales and production levels, but to do so in a way that would impart a sense of stability. Those attempts, however, were greatly complicated by the rising popularity of automobiles. Still, members of the bicycle industry believed that cars would experience a similar loss of appeal—just as bicycles had ten years prior. Though some bicycle and parts manufacturers seemed wary of boosting sales based on consumer fads, there were others who attempted to get middle-class men and society women back
on bicycles in the hope that it would lead to a resurgence of cycling’s fashionability. Slowly, the industry was forced to admit that their target market had moved on.

The automobile proved to be more than just a passing fad and as it continued to maintain the attention of all classes, the bicycle industry targeted a consumer group that would never be able to buy cars—children. The problem was two-fold. Cars stole consumers’ attention and more importantly, they changed the way Americans thought about mobility. The automobile became the standard by which all other forms of movement were measured and as sales began to outpace those of bicycles, the car became a symbol of the nation. The car became synonymous with freedom and as prices decreased it was held up as a beacon of America’s democratic promise. The changing ideals of mobility in which the car was the epitome of masculinity and patriotism reaffirmed the bicycle industry’s decision to concentrate on children.

In reaction, the industry did not change the nature of its appeals, it simply shifted to a different demographic. Concentrating on children afforded the bicycle industry an opportunity to stimulate sales, but it was also a matter of convenience because it did not require a reworking of the ideals associated with cycling. Alterations in bicycle marketing to focus on children occurred at the dawn of a new era in which childhood consumerism would become too powerful and too pervasive to ignore. The bicycle’s history reveals how efforts to train Americans to be good consumers for the benefit of their nation began during childhood. Indeed, childhood in general was changing so that instead of being a time of frivolity, it evolved into a period in which one prepared for adulthood. This made the move to children—particularly boys—doubly convenient for the bicycle industry. Traits that were once virtues for adults—such as independence,
strength, health, and consumerism—were implanted into ideals of childhood, thereby allowing bicycle boosters to repurpose old marketing strategies. They could now use appeals made to men in the 1890s on boys in the 1910s-50s. This meant that the industry did not have to recreate the symbolic nature of the bicycle. In some ways, however, it inadvertently did just that.

Bicycle boosters’ success in marketing the bicycle as a means of independence, health, and fun for boys led the bicycle to become increasingly association with boyhood. As bicycles became a means for boys to train for manhood, bicycles were transformed into a commodity that was primarily for a single stage in life. Once a person moved beyond that stage, they also moved beyond bicycles. Just as the car had grown to become a symbol of American adulthood and success, bicycles were symbolic of childhood. These interconnections between the bicycle and childhood, while successful in selling bicycles to children, had an adverse impact on cycling’s appeal to American adults. In its efforts to increase and stabilize sales, the bicycle industry alienated adult consumers and inadvertently stigmatized their product.

To a degree, the bicycle industry’s effort to make their product more appealing to children during the first half of the twentieth century was wise. This was especially true considering the boom in population experienced after World War II—that influx of children, however, would become adults soon enough. In order to reach its fullest potential, the bicycle industry needed to avoid limiting its appeals to children. But how could it reconcile successful efforts to make bicycles the subject of childhood fantasy with the need to promote a side of cycling that was suitable for adults? Manufactures busied themselves building bicycles with holsters for cap guns, fake gas tanks, and other
embellishments that made it impractical, indeed laughable, for adults. After successfully marketing bicycles to children, adults would either have to be pushed into cycling by outside forces, or the industry would have to recreate the image of the bicycle as a commodity for adults and children. Adult models would have to look significantly different from children’s models.

This came to pass with the introduction and mass production of “ten speed” bicycles at the close of the 1960s. The ten speed grew in popularity in the 1970s, as the nation encountered an energy crisis and another exercise boom. With the 1980s came the first American cycling team to compete in the Tour de France and an American champion of competitive cycling’s biggest event. The three Tour victories for Greg LeMond from 1986 to 1990 and subsequent seven consecutive victories of Lance Armstrong from 1999-2005 all had an undoubtedly positive impact on cycling in the United States—this was true even outside of the competitive aspects. Currently, bicycle sales have gained momentum due largely to the rising price of fuel and concerns with global warming. Still, comparatively speaking, bicycle usage in the United States is far from the levels of many other countries. The increasing usage of bicycles for utilitarian purposes in the United States as well as other developed countries, however, has the potential to make cycling a symbol of post-modernity. A new day is dawning for the bicycle. Adults are once again coming to see it as a commodity that is more than a child’s toy.

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Autobiography


Articles and Books


EDUCATION_________________________________________________
*Master of Arts, History, May 2009 University of Kentucky*
*Bachelor of Arts, History, May 2002 University of Kentucky*

EMPLOYMENT______________________________________________
Campbellsville University, August 2013 – December 2013 Adjunct Instructor
University of Kentucky, May 2013 – Present Part-Time Instructor
University of Kentucky, August 2010 – May 2013 Teaching Assistant
Greenebaum Doll & McDonald PLLC, September 2007 – July 2010 Librarian Assistance
Legal Aid Society of Louisville, May 2004 – July 2007 Paralegal
University of Kentucky, December 1999 - May 2001 Resident Advisor

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES, MEMBERSHIPS, and AWARDS ___
North American Society for Sport History
University of Kentucky Political Party – Co-Chair
National Council for Black Studies
Phi Alpha Theta
Mortar Board
Leadership Scholarship
University of Kentucky Teaching Assistantship
George C. Herring Fellowship
Outstanding Graduate Essay Prize – 18th Annual Bluegrass Symposium
H-Net (H-Sport) – Co-editor of “Theses and Dissertations in Progress List”
Roberta J. Park graduate student assistantship
Sport & Society – Graduate Scholar Award

PUBLICATIONS____________________________________________

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