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Knights, Dudes, And Shadow Steeds:
Late Victorian Culture And The Early Cycling Clubs
Of New Orleans, 1881-1891

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
History

by

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B.A. Boston University, 2001
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Abstract

In the 1880s, two cycling clubs formed in New Orleans—the New Orleans Bicycle Club in 1881 and the Louisiana Cycling Club in 1887. These clubs were institutions of Victorian middle class culture that, like other athletic clubs, arose from the conditions of urban modernity and Victorian class anxieties. The NOBC, like other American cycling clubs, conformed to Victorian values of order and respectability. The attitudes and activities of the LCC, whose membership was younger, reflected instead a counter-Victorian ethos. This paper examines these two clubs in the context of late Victorian culture in New Orleans as it responded both to the conditions of urban modernity common to American cities in this period and to the particular cultural situation of New Orleans at the end of the nineteenth century, including proximity to and amalgamation with the recently-dominant, non-Anglo culture of the Creoles.

Bicycle, cycling club, wheelmen, athletic club, Victorian culture, New Orleans

Introduction

On a February night in New Orleans, a crowd lined St. Charles Avenue from Lee Circle to Louisiana Avenue, twenty-five blocks, to witness a procession of lanterns floating like a swarm of fireflies up the darkened street. First came the bandwagon, pulled along by four horses led by the famous acrobat and vaudeville theater magnate Signor Faranta. And behind that came seventy of those novel wheeled machines that had first appeared on the city streets seven years before. Perched four feet from the ground on their high wheel bicycles came the costumed “Romeo,” and behind him Mephistopheles astride flapping wings of red, and parasols and umbrellas fringed round with multi-colored lights, a ship with its signal lights burning, a page, a soldier. Dressed as The Mikado, the Grand Marshall appeared on a tricycle illuminated by eighteen Chinese lanterns and covered by a twelve-foot Japanese umbrella, from which dangled fifty Chinese jewels. Nanki Poo and his Mandarin friend rode together on a tandem tricycle, its large wheel interwoven with gold and silver sun fish, topped with a Chinese pagoda fourteen feet across, fifteen feet high, graced with six dozen lanterns in crossing arches. And behind them came more in costumes: a man dressed in black with the figure of a human skeleton outlined in white; a young man dressed as a ballerina; devils, jockeys, princes, harlequins; silk, velvet, and glitter all displayed to the delight of the people of New Orleans in a procession on wheels.¹

This fairy spectacle was the Carnival bicycle parade of 1887. The parade had been planned for the Monday before Mardi Gras and billed as a main feature of that year’s Carnival. Pouring rain had forced them to postpone it until Ash Wednesday, the day after Mardi Gras. Although the parade was held on a day that was supposed to be the end of Carnival and the first day of the Lenten season, Rex, the King of Carnival, and his queen watched from a balcony and applauded the luminous scene along with the crowd assembled along St. Charles Avenue.

¹ “Carnival on Wheels,” *Daily Picayune*, February 25, 1887.

The organizers of the parade were members of local cycling clubs, institutions born of late Victorianism and its encounter with the conditions of urban modernity. The intended audience was the middle-class Anglo society of Uptown New Orleans. What these New Orleanians gazed upon that night was a spectacle of their Anglo Protestant culture as it responded both to the unsettling conditions of urban modernity shared by all American Victorians and to those conditions particular to New Orleans. Contradictions abounded. This parade of machines that embodied modernity was laden with imagery that harkened to a Victorian popular idealization of premodern cultures—Oriental, Medieval, and Renaissance—that signaled a yearning for escape from the controlled rationality of the modern experience. It was, also, a parade to celebrate a European, Catholic festival put on by and for Anglo Protestants, a cultural appropriation that had taken place three decades earlier, in a process that not only Americanized New Orleans but Creolized Anglo culture in the city.

The latter aspect of this amalgamation is apparent in the evolution of cycling club culture in New Orleans. The organizers of the Carnival parade later that year formed the Louisiana Cycling Club, an organization of younger membership and more youthful spirit than the NOBC. The scrapbook that the members kept during the club's existence from 1887 to 1891 provides insight into the subculture that they formed around the bicycle. What is apparent is that, while ultimately a product of Anglo Protestant culture and retaining many of the functions of middle-class men's clubs of the era, this club, unlike the LCC, broke from Victorianism in ways that reflected the cultural dichotomy of the city.

This paper will examine the two major clubs active in New Orleans between 1880 and 1891—the New Orleans Bicycle Club and the Louisiana Cycling Club—and how they grew

from Victorian culture's encounter with modernity, including the role of class conflict and the struggle for social and cultural dominance by the white middle class. By focusing on the subculture of the LCC through the scrapbook, I will look at a generational shift that occurred in which these young, white, middle-class men eschewed the Protestant Victorian culture of their parents for a less constricting and more culturally pluralistic set of values. A close examination of these cycling clubs in the context of their locality reveals the ways that particular cycling clubs, although part of a national subculture, also embodied the particularities of their locations.

Overview: Boneshakers to High Wheels

In 1879, the high wheel bicycle appeared in the United States. The machine, a large wheel with a pedal crank attached to the hub and a much smaller wheel attached behind by a steel "backbone," followed the "boneshaker" model that had appeared in the 1860s. The boneshaker, with its two wheels of roughly equal size and a pedal crank attached to the front, had been made of iron with wooden wheels and was notoriously difficult to ride. When it appeared, it sparked a short-lived fad among the rich but quickly proved impractical and was discarded by all but a tiny group of determined enthusiasts. The high wheel, developed in Europe, was a much superior design, benefitting from a lighter hollow steel frame and metal spokes that allowed the front wheel to be made bigger and bigger while retaining both lightness and strength. The large size of the wheel meant greater torque and a faster machine, and this new invention caught the attention once more of the American urban middle class.²

Beginning in 1880, bicycle clubs sprang up in all major cities and some smaller ones in the United States. These social organizations held group rides for members and put on races,

² Sidney H. Aronson, "The Sociology of the Bicycle," *Social Forces* 30, no. 3 (March 1, 1952): 305-312; David V. Herlihy, *Bicycle: a history* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005): 75-154; Dale A. Somers, "A City on Wheels: The Bicycle Era in New Orleans," *Louisiana History* 8, no. 3 (July 1967): 221; Herlihy, 182-199.

both for their own pleasure and for the entertainment of the public. In the late nineteenth century American city, the demand for leisure activities and amusements was high. Bicycle races, along with other sports such as boxing and baseball, rose as mass entertainment. By 1883 most large cities had tracks for bicycle racing at their fair grounds.³

The cycling clubs of the 1880s sought to promote the bicycle not only as an amusement but practical transportation. The bicycle, so many believed, offered a better alternative to the systems of mass transit—horse and mule drawn omnibuses and street railways—that had developed over the last fifty years. Besides allowing the rider to quickly traverse expanding cities, the bicycle offered a means of escaping the crowds, noise, and filth of the city for the solace of the country. The bicycle clubs that popped up like mushrooms in nearly every city in America in the early 1880s sought not only mutual enjoyment of their hobby but to win over the public's acceptance of the bicycle as practical transportation.⁴

In late nineteenth century New Orleans, cycling clubs influenced politics, public opinion, and the physical infrastructure of New Orleans. Harry Hodgson, a prominent businessman and leading cycling advocate in New Orleans, wrote in September of 1887: "There is a better feeling now towards wheelmen than ever before in this city and State, citizens who formerly regarded the wheel as a toy, or child's sport . . . have begun to realize that the wheel as practical mode of transportation is a fixed fact." That year the "safety" first appeared. The design of two equal-sized wheels and a low-seated frame was much easier and safer to ride, and greatly encouraged the adoption of the bicycle as mode of transportation and recreation among the wider public.

³ Dale A. Somers, *The Rise of Sports in New Orleans* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1972) 227, ii; *Wheeling Register*. June 13, 1886.

⁴ For a discussion of the development of mass transit in the United States, see Howard P. Chudacoff and Judith E. Smith, *The Evolution of American Urban Society*, 6th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2005); Brian J. Cudahy, *Cash Tokens, and Transfers: A History of Urban Mass Transit in North America* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1992); Clay McShane, *Down the Asphalt Path* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

According to one report, with the introduction of asphalt pavement, cycling by 1887 had become "a very general means of locomotion. St. Charles Avenue leads from the suburbs to within a mile of our business center and every morning scores of clerks, business men, and college students wheel their way to several locations." By the 1890s New Orleans, along with the rest of the country, was experiencing a bicycle boom, as hundreds of cyclists, both male and female, formed new clubs.⁵

Literature Review

Until recently, studies of cycling history have been concerned with describing social, economic, and geographical change resulting from technological development. *Bartleet's Bicycle Book*, published in 1931, was probably the earliest modern history of the bicycle. It was written as a linear study of technological development with commentary on the social effects of each development, with all cycling activity assumed to follow from the development of cycling technology. Sidney H. Aronson's "Sociology of the Bicycle," published in *Social Forces* in 1952, followed the same pattern—an early history of the bicycle and its social and economic impacts. Aronson provided the basic history of the technological development of the bicycle, from the draisine or "dandy-horse" of the early nineteenth century to the development of the chain-driven "safety." Aronson's discussion of the bicycle follows the model that would remain prevalent for decades: social and economic change flowing from technological progress.⁶

⁵ *L.A.W. Bulletin* vol 5. (September 2, 1887), Page 133. <http://www.archive.org>; Louisiana Cycling Club Spokes Scrapbook, 1887-1891, 92-62-L, Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, LA; Somers, "A City on Wheels," 219–238.

⁶ *Bartleet's Bicycle Book* is out of print and not readily available. Nicholas Oddy describes it in a brief literature review of cycling history in an article in *Cycling and Society*. Nicholas Oddy, "The Flaneur on Wheels?" in *Cycling and Society*, ed. David Horton, Paul Rosen, and Peter Cox (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 98.; Sidney H. Aronson, "The Sociology of the Bicycle," *Social Forces* 30, no. 3 (March 1, 1952): 305–312.

Aronson's history comprises several aspects: conflicts surrounding the bicycle, its social impacts on women, economic impact of the bicycle industry, use by the military, cycling as organized sport, and its significance as predecessor to the automobile. First, he discusses the initial objection of the public to bicycles on city streets—as they frightened horses and threatened pedestrians—and the attendant political battles over the cyclists' right to the road. In the context of political activism he mentions the formation of the League of American Wheelmen, the national organization of cyclists that formed in 1878 (he claims 1880). He also covers the disputes in the medical profession over the healthfulness of cycling—whether it was physically hazardous or practically a cure-all in its capacity as exercise.⁷

The most important social consequence of the bicycle, he claims, was liberation of women, who used it to attain freedom to move around the city un-chaperoned. He also discusses the effects on women's fashion, as women cyclists shortened their skirts and donned bloomers to accommodate their bicycles. The bicycle industry also had economic impacts, as Aronson discusses, in the form of the development of mass manufacturing and the production of fashionable consumer goods, including not only the bicycles themselves but accessories and sundries to go along with them. Use of bicycles in the military and cycling as an organized sport get brief mention. And finally, Aronson explains how cyclists, in agitating for road improvements to smooth the way for their hobby, helped pave the way, literally, for automobiles.⁸

In 1972, Robert A. Smith published *A Social History of the Bicycle*, a general survey of bicycle history and its social impacts and functions in the late nineteenth century. Smith's book

⁷ Aronson, 305-312.

⁸ Aronson, 308.

follows this same basic pattern as Aronson's article, covering the subjects of good roads and women's fashion.⁹

In 1967, Dale Somers published "A City on Wheels: The Bicycle Era in New Orleans" in *Louisiana History*. This article later became a chapter in his 1972 book, *The Rise of Sports in New Orleans*. "A City on Wheels" places the entry of the bicycle into mass urban culture in the context of the rise of recreational sport in the industrializing American city. Somers considers the mass adoption of the bicycle by the urban middle class in the 1890s in the wider context of the rise of organized sports and interest in athletic activity as needed release from the pressures of urbanization and industrialization. Cycling, he says, was widely popular with the middle class in the 1890s as a pleasurable form of exercise at a time with people needed relief from the conditions of the industrialized city. Somers describes the activities of the New Orleans Bicycle Club and the Louisiana Cycling Club—including races and group outings.¹⁰

Smith's and Somers's studies appeared among the sports scholarship that rose with a general turn to social history in the 1960s and 1970s. Other cycling scholarship of the time included Gary Allan Tobin's "The Bicycle Boom of the 1890's: The Development of Private Transportation and the Birth of the Modern Tourist" and "Progress and Flight: An Interpretation of the American Cycle Craze of the 1890s." Following these studies, however, scholarship on the bicycle virtually disappeared. Steven A. Reiss's 1990 review essay, "The New Sport History," notes the new interest in sport scholarship from the 1960s with the rise of social history and the influence of cultural anthropology. His review, describing the features of sport scholarship in the 1980s and the debates within, does not mention cycling at all. His contemporaneous book, *City*

⁹ Robert A. Smith, *A Social History of the Bicycle* (American Heritage Press, 1972).

¹⁰ Somers, "A City on Wheels," 219–238.

Games, a study of urban sports, does give brief attention to the bicycle, relying on the scholarship of Smith, Harmond, and Tobin, with no further analysis of his own.¹¹

However, since Reiss's essay, scholarship on the bicycle has been on the rise. The flourishing of cycling scholarship in the last three decades owes much to the International Cycling History Conference. Founded in 1990, the ICHC began offering scholars of cycling opportunity to present findings and exchange ideas, with a core group of scholars coalescing around the subject, producing a centralized venue for debate and collaboration. These major scholars of cycling history include Nicholas Oddy, Glen Norcliffe, David Herlihy, and Hans-Erhard Lessing. With the aegis of the ICHC, serious study and debate around cycling history is now emerging.

Since the turn of the century, interest in the history of the bicycle has rapidly increased, both broadening in scope and focusing on specific social and cultural issues. In 2001, Glen Norcliffe published *The Ride to Modernity*, an early history of the bicycle in Canada. In this book, Norcliffe is concerned with the early history of the bicycle in the context of modernity and introduces new theories. Specifically, Norcliffe applies "carrier wave" theory to the bicycle, identifying the bicycle industry as key to propelling the economic, technological, and social developments by which modernity in the twentieth century is defined. His treatment differs from previous ones in that he explores not just *what* happened, but *how*. Norcliffe also introduces a novel cultural component to bicycle history in his proposition of the "flâneur on wheels," an extension of Baudelaire's modern character wandering afoot in Paris to bicycle riders out to

¹¹ Richard Harmond, "Progress and Flight: An Interpretation of the American Cycle Craze of the 1890s." *Journal of Social History* 5, no. 2 (December 1, 1971): 235–257; Steven A. Reiss, "The New Sport History." *Reviews in American History* 18, no. 3 (September 1, 1990): 311–325; Gary Allan Tobin, "The Bicycle Boom of the 1890's: The Development of Private Transportation and the Birth of the Modern Tourist." *The Journal of Popular Culture* VII, no. 4 (1974): 838–849; Steven A. Reiss, *City Games: The Evolutions of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 62–68.

enjoy the scenery, to see and be seen. Norcliffe offers a fresh and sophisticated take on late nineteenth century bicycle history through this proposition and his carrier wave analysis. However, although he aspires to a cultural treatment, his book remains essentially economic and social in its analysis of technological carrier waves and social change rather than belief and value systems.¹²

In 2007, *Cycling and Society* was published as a compilation of essays representing an array of approaches to the study of cycling. For his contribution to *Cycling*, Norcliffe collaborated with fellow geographer Phillip Gordon Mackintosh to examine the role of the bicycle in a gendered construction of urban geography at the turn of the century. Their thesis, exploring the bicycle's relation to class and gender, positions cycling in the 1890s as agent of confirmation of bourgeois class distinction and values of domesticity. This new take on women and the bicycle goes well beyond the traditional one of the bicycle as female liberator, arguing that cyclists "promoted well-established constructions and divisions of gender." Rather than constructing the bicycle as feminine liberator, Norcliffe and Mackintosh argue that women domesticated the bicycle. Their argument complicates the traditional orthodoxy of linear social progress.¹³

The political activity of early cyclists, while subject of brief commentary in previous histories, has lately been more closely examined. Norcliffe's 2006 article "Associations, Modernity, and the Insider-citizens of a Victorian Highwheel Bicycle Club" studies the Montreal Bicycle Club as an example of how voluntary associations functioned within a wider society in exercising political power through organizations structured according to their masculine

¹² Glen Norcliffe, *The Ride to Modernity: The Bicycle in Canada, 1869-1900* (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

¹³ Glen Norcliffe and Phillip Gordon Mackintosh, "Men, Women and the Bicycle: Gender and Social Geography of Cycling in the Late Nineteenth-Century," in *Cycling and Society*, ed. David Horton, Paul Rosen, and Peter Cox (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 153.

hierarchical vision. The Victorian highwheel association, he argues advanced its vision of technological-citizenship, championing a “technologically sophisticated modern society.” Norcliffe characterizes the MBC as predicated on exclusionary membership and the promotion of cycling as symbolizing a “masculine society in which fearlessness and bourgeois courtesies held sway.” The MCB emphasized a chivalric and orderly version of modern masculinity through the strict orderliness of its public activities and its conception of riders as “knights of the highwheel.” Besides masculine orderliness, the clubs also embodied the Victorian value of fellowship and promoted social solidarity among its insider-citizens.¹⁴

As evidenced by the studies of Norcliffe and Mackintosh, among others, the study of early cycling clubs opens avenues of study of late-Victorian culture in general. Discussions of culture in New Orleans in this period are hard to come by, and are usually subsumed in discussions of Carnival and jazz—culture in the most vernacular sense.¹⁵ Eric Arnesen’s *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans* offers a useful social history of the struggles between laborers and the commercial elite of this period, while Joy Jackson’s *New Orleans in the Gilded Age* is most useful as a political history. My study of the cycling clubs of New Orleans, in a similar vein to Norcliffe’s study of the MBC, will be a lens through which to examine late Victorian culture in New Orleans and how its particular geographic, social, and economic situation shaped its response to modernity.¹⁶

Athletic Clubs and the Anglo Middle Class of New Orleans

¹⁴ Glen Norcliffe, “Associations, Modernity, and the Insider Citizens of a Victorian Highwheel Bicycle Club.” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 19, no. 2 (2006): 121-150.

¹⁵ A recent example is the 2006 book *New Orleans: A Cultural History*, written not by a historian but a journalist, which is largely descriptive rather than analytical. Louise McKinney, *New Orleans: A Cultural History* (Oxford University Press, 2006).

¹⁶ Eric Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans: Race, Class, and Politics, 1863-1923* (Urban and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

To understand the historical context of the formation of bicycle clubs in New Orleans in the 1880s, there are two developments of the modern American city and of New Orleans in particular to be considered: the formation of athletic clubs among the white middle class and the development of urban geography. The rise of cycling clubs and the development of a subculture around cycling in New Orleans occurred at the axis of the two.

In his class analysis of Canadian cycling clubs in this period, Glen Norcliffe credits the Anglo elite's affinity for cycling to the consumeristic nature of the modern middle class. "The succession of novelties during the boom—new bicycles, new accessories, and new cycling experiences—fueled the interest of the elite in cycling." The bicycle as a consumer object certainly functioned as a status symbol that distinguished its owner as prosperous, and the succession of new models and proliferation of cycling accessories clearly reflect the consumeristic appetites of the Victorian bourgeoisie. What Norcliffe misses, however, is the role of class conflict as the white middle class sought to distinguish themselves and maintain dominance in an increasingly heterogeneous urban society in which their authority and power was perceived as threatened.¹⁷

In the late nineteenth century, the Victorian bourgeoisie in New Orleans and the rest of the country was experiencing a host of anxieties as they confronted the conditions of modern urban life, including a perceived challenge to the manhood of middle-class men. The American economy was moving into a bureaucratized corporate system based on specialized work and increasing interdependence, eroding the sense of personal autonomy that lay at the core of American Protestant morality. Coupled with that was the degree of material comfort in which they lived and the sedentary nature of their lives as office workers and parlor sitters. In what

¹⁷ Norcliffe, *The Ride to Modernity*, 188; Somers, *The Rise of Sports in New Orleans*, 241.

some labeled an “over-civilized” society, the middle class feared the loss of individual autonomy and physical vigor. These fears fed into that of diminished dominance as waves of European immigrants challenged the urban political power of the middle class and an outbreak of labor strikes threatened the social and economic order. Because, as Gale Bederman has pointed out, politics “dramatized and reinforced men’s connection, as men, to the very real power of the government,” the power of manhood rested in the ability to maintain order. Maintaining both social and political control was essential to preserving the manhood of white middle-class men.¹⁸

The Anglo middle class of New Orleans shared these conditions with their counterparts in other American cities while confronting the particular historical conditions of the city. Whereas other American cities were founded on the authority of Anglo society, its cultural dominance in New Orleans had only recently been established. Following the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, when New Orleans became part of the United States, and to a greater degree after the 1815 Battle of New Orleans, Americans began emigrating in numbers to seek their fortunes in the booming port city. These new immigrants, originating largely from the former English colonies of the Northeast, were nearly all Anglophone Protestants. They brought with them Victorian values of ambition, discipline, and sobriety that clashed with that of the incumbent Latin culture. For the first part of the century, the Americans were locked in a battle for economic, political, and cultural dominance with the Creoles—the French- and Spanish-speaking, Catholic descendants of the original European settlers. They segregated themselves not

¹⁸ Gale Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 12; T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace* (Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1994), 12, 26-34; Howard P. Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor*, 217; Reiss, 16; Bederman, 11-13.

only socially but geographically, building homes in a new section of the city that came to be known as the “American Quarter.”¹⁹

With geographical and social segregation came conflict. In 1836, the state legislature, at the behest of the Americans, split New Orleans into three municipalities which, although governed by the same mayor and police force, were in control of their own internal financial affairs. That system was abandoned in 1852, “but only after the Americans established alliances with uptown German and Irish immigrants to ensure numerical superiority over the Creoles.” The Europeans who arrived in New Orleans during the first major wave of European immigration, from the 1820s to 1850s, had not only settled largely uptown but identified with and aspired to emulate the Americans. Thus, by mid-century, the Anglo elite had secured economic and political dominance.²⁰

By the end of the century, the Anglo middle class of New Orleans was engaged in new battles for dominance along the lines of both race and class. The tensions between Anglos and Creoles shriveled in importance beside the struggle between black and white after the Civil War. Beginning with Reconstruction, the Americanization of the city accelerated and segregation and the struggle to establish white supremacy radicalized. “Victory of the Radicals and its creation of a flood of sable citizens” writes Joseph Tregle, “loosed upon the land what whites perceived as the menace of black domination . . .” In the 1880s, New Orleans experienced a second wave of European immigration made up of eastern and southern European immigrants, including a large wave of Sicilians. These new immigrants concentrated in the urban core and comprised a new

¹⁹ Richard Campanella, “The White Teapot,” *Bienville’s Dilemma: A Historical Geography of New Orleans* (Lafayette, LA: Center for Louisiana Studies, 2008), 191; Joseph G. Tregle, Jr., “Creoles and Americans” in *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, ed. Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 147.

²⁰ Campanella, “Geography of Urban Growth, 1788-2008” in *Bienville’s Dilemma*, 157; Tregle, 156; Campanella, “Streetscapes of Amalgamation” in *Bienville’s Dilemma*, 267.

class of urban industrial laborers that was part of the new modern economy. As in the rest of the United States, this decade was a time of huge labor strikes in New Orleans. Labor organizations made up of blacks and immigrant and native-born whites held tightly to power through the Democratic party machine called the Ring. As a result, those in the commercial elite, primarily made up of the Anglo Protestants of Uptown, no longer enjoyed political power on the level of their economic power.²¹

All of these circumstances put pressure on the Anglo elite of New Orleans to exercise dominance, and one way that they did this was through the establishment of elite social clubs, including gentlemen's athletic clubs. In New Orleans as in other American cities, interest and participation in organized athletics rose sharply in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In the last fifteen years of the nineteenth century, New Orleanians formed more than twenty athletic clubs. In *The Rise of Sports In New Orleans*, Dale Somers cites a number of reasons for this. "The growth of the city and attendant urban pressures, the appearance of appealing new sports in other parts of the country, and a further decline in the workweek played a vital role in the sporting boom. Sports profited also from widespread recognition of the salubrious effects of physical exercise." While sports appealed to all classes and races that found themselves living in the constricting conditions of an industrializing urban society, organized competitive sports held special appeal for the white middle class. One reason was that competitive sports allowed men to reclaim a sense of power and "manliness." Also, organized sports were perceived as a means of maintaining bourgeois values of discipline and productivity, and were thought to "recapture preindustrial vigor without sacrificing the benefits of industrial progress." The Victorian bourgeoisie embraced sport as useful in reinforcing values of discipline and social order while

²¹ Tregle, 173; Richard McGraw, *Confronting Modernity: Art and Society in Louisiana* (University of Mississippi Press, 2008), 23; Campanella, "The Rise and Fall of the Immigrant Belt" in *Bienville's Dilemma*, 176; Bederman, 13. Arnesen, 76.

providing revitalizing effects for businessmen, rendering them more productive workers back at the office.²²

But according to Somers, members of the middle and upper class of New Orleans were also attracted to the exclusivity of gentlemen's athletic clubs. Besides being racially exclusive, such clubs effectively closed themselves off from the working class by maintaining strict standards of amateurism and requiring high fees. "What these clubs prized was the young man of high social standing who was physically fit, morally sound, and athletically incorruptible—the gentleman player." The purpose of the gentleman athletic club was as much the expression of social exclusivity as the physical invigoration of the middle class.

The function of social exclusivity is clearly visible in the New Orleans Bicycle Club, the first cycling club that formed in New Orleans, in 1881. Its membership was that of the professional and merchant class, many of whom belonged to a number of other such exclusive clubs and whose names appeared in the society pages of the the *Daily Picayune*. The NOBC's founder, A.M. Hill, had come to New Orleans just after the Civil War to establish himself as an entrepreneur through his pen and jewelry business. He was a leading member of another exclusive athletic club, the Young Men's Gymnastic Club. The president of the NOBC in 1881 was Dr. W. R. Mandeville, also a high-ranking Mason. C.H. Genslinger was half of the printing partnership Hunter & Genslinger. Harry Fairfax was the son of John Wheeler Fairfax, a prominent broker and owner of the *Daily City Item*.²³

²² Somers, *The Rise of Sports in New Orleans*, 241; Somers, *The Rise of Sports in New Orleans*, 86; Howard P. Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor: Creating an American Subculture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 217; Lears, 108; Lears, 86. Steven A. Riess, "Sport and the Redefinition of American Middle-class Masculinity," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* vol 8 no 1 (1991), 8-10.

²³ "A Bicycle Club," *Daily Picayune*, April 30, 1881; *The Book of the Chamber of Commerce* 1st ed (New Orleans: Geo. W. Englehart, 1894), 131. Spokes, 15b. For the Young

The rules and procedures for gaining membership to the NOBC, as well as the membership dues and the cost of buying a bicycle, closed the club off to an economic as well as social elite. Membership was contingent upon election and the payment of steep dues, with an initiation fee of \$5 and annual dues of \$12, and the cost of the bicycle itself was prohibitive, at between \$120 and \$150. But beyond the economic boundaries, the charter of the New Orleans Bicycle Club reflects the need to maintain social exclusivity. Article VI, section 1 spells out the procedure for gaining admission to the club:

Each candidate for membership must be recommended by two members of the Club, who shall hand his name with admission fee to the Secretary-Treasurer and by him be posted on the Bulletin board for at least seven days before the meeting at which his name shall be voted upon. Any applicant to be eligible for membership must be at least eighteen years of age, and must own a 'cycle or show some disposition to obtaining one. Any candidate for admission not favorably reported on by the Board of Trustees may be granted a hearing before the Club and may be admitted by the unanimous vote of the members present, except the Board of Trustees. All elections for membership shall be by secret ballot, and three negatives (or black balls) shall reject. No candidate once rejected shall again be proposed for six months.²⁴

The object of the club, as the charter states, was both mutual enjoyment among cyclists and the promotion of the bicycle as “a practicable and enjoyable aid to locomotion by the general public.” In service to this aim the club made regular runs around the city and to the resorts on the outskirts, wearing uniforms, riding together in coordinated rows, executing precise maneuvers in unison, and riding with enforced procedures for passing wagons and carriages on the street. But

Men’s Gymnastic Club, see Somers, *The Rise of Sports in New Orleans*, 240; “Masonic Reunion,” *Daily Picayune*, May 28, 1906; *Daily Picayune*, September 6, 1888.

²⁴ *Charter, By-Laws and Road Rules of the New Orleans Bicycle Club*, (New Orleans: Hunter and Genslinger, Printers, 48 Camp St., 1886), New Orleans Public Library Louisiana Division. Rare Vertical Files. Charters, No. 63, 13.

the exclusivity of the cycling club was necessary to both establish and preserve the Victorian propriety of the sport for its members.²⁵

It was important to these athletic gentlemen to maintain a distinction between their sporting activities and those of the “lower” classes of immigrants and laborers. From this need came the modern definitions of amateur versus professional sportsmen. “This definition,” writes Somers, “borrowed from England where custom and practice rigidly separated gentlemen from other players, generally restricted the amateur class to America’s sporting gentry whose wealth and leisure permitted them to indulge in sports with no concern for financial reward.” This distinction became a function and preoccupation of both the NOBC and the League of American Wheelmen.²⁶

Members of the NOBC were required to maintain membership to the LAW, the national organization formed in 1880. The LAW had a myriad of purposes related to cycling, including political lobbying for the rights of bicyclists to use public roads and the improvement of those roads. The organization served as a road club as well, providing guidance to cycling tourists and discounts for members at hotels and other establishments. The LAW also served as a racing league that standardized the rules and procedures of cycling races held all over the country. To belong to the LAW, one must have been strictly an amateur cyclist, meaning that one did not and had not ever profited monetarily from cycling. The distinction was deeply significant, because an amateur sportsman was considered a gentleman, while a professional sportsman was not.²⁷

²⁵ *Charter, By-Laws and Road Rules of the New Orleans Bicycle Club* (New Orleans:

²⁶ Somers, *The Rise of Sports*, 87.

²⁷ *Charter, By-Laws and Road Rules of the New Orleans Bicycle Club*; Clipping, “League of American Wheelmen: Its Objects and History,” in *Louisiana Cycling Club Spokes Scrapbook*, 31a; “Wheelmen Work for Good Roads,” *Daily Picayune*, February 26, 1894; Norciffe, “Associations, Modernity, and the Insider Citizens of a Victorian Highwheel Bicycle Club,” 133.

The NOBC's preoccupation with Victorian propriety went beyond the amateur athlete distinction. The charter sets out strict standards for both dress and conduct, the latter extending even beyond club activities. Article XII, Section 1, entitled "Discipline," warns of the consequences of "ungentlemanly" behavior:

Any Officer who neglects his duty, or any member found guilty of violating the By-laws or Rules of the Club, or of conduct unbecoming a gentleman may after a trial by the Club, a notice of which he shall have seven (7) days previous, and at which he may be heard in his own defense, be admonished, suspended, or expelled by a two-thirds vote of the members present.²⁸

The New Orleans Bicycle Club in the early 1880s was very similar to the Montreal Bicycle Club, which Glen Norcliffe has studied as an instance of Victorian culture in Canada. Norcliffe has pointed out that, like the NOBC, membership in the MBC was drawn from the wealthy, Protestant section of Montreal, another city of mixed Anglo and French ethnicity. Membership in the MBC was "plainly elitist"; admission to the club was expensive and difficult to attain. Like the NOBC, the club's rules and procedures were meant to maintain, reflect, and propagate a strict social order based on Victorian ideals of hierarchy and propriety. "The central obligation was . . . to be a gentleman at all times." The MBC was exclusively male and observed a patriarchal system in which younger members were expected to bite their tongues in deference to their elders.²⁹

While membership in the NOBC required membership in the LAW, not all cyclists and not all members of the LAW in New Orleans were members of NOBC. In 1887, a few young cyclists formed a second organization, the Louisiana Cycling Club. The principal founders, Harry Hodgson and Ritchie Betts, had been responsible for the organization of the Carnival

²⁸ *Charter of the New Orleans Bicycle Club*, 16.

²⁹ Norcliffe, "Associations," 138-143.

lantern parade earlier that year, and many of the key participants in the parade became members of the new club. Betts was eighteen when he formed the club, and the membership consisted in part of cyclists who were under eighteen and therefore barred from membership in both the NOBC and the LAW. The LCC exhibited the same function of social exclusivity as the NOBC. Its membership was made up of the sons of prominent businessmen, including the likes of Isidore Newman, a prominent investor, and well-known physician (and inventor of Dr. Tichenor's antiseptic) Dr. George Tichenor. However, this new club parted ways in many respects from the NOBC. Membership was younger (the NOBC did not allow members under 18), and the club was often referred to in the papers as "progressive." In contrast to the seriousness of the NOBC, the LCC had other interests in mind besides maintaining Victorian propriety. The purpose of the LCC was fun and revelry, throwing parties, going on group outings to picnics in the countryside, drinking, and generally enjoying themselves. But for the young cyclists of the LCC, a primary concern was the transportation problem posed by Victorian geography, in the form of suburbanization.³⁰

Victorian Geography

While cycling clubs functioned as important social institutions for the New Orleans bourgeoisie, the bicycle itself served as a solution to an essentially Victorian transportation dilemma. As the white middle class sought to distinguish itself socially through exclusive clubs, it also segregated itself geographically through the development of suburbs farther and farther from the city center. The dominant narrative of the development of urban transportation has been that the streetcar allowed for the development of suburbs. Clay McShane has argued that it was the other way around, that the culture of suburbanization produced the new technology of street

³⁰ *Bicycle South*, vol 8 no 5 (May 1886), 7; *Charter, By-Laws and Road Rules of the New Orleans Bicycle Club*, 21; *Spokes*, 13a, 19a.1 and 31b.1.

railways in order to serve the suburbs. He credits the Victorian taste for suburban living to the evangelical religious views of Anglo Protestantism in which urban living was considered morally inferior to the more pastoral suburbs as well as their “widely held ideas about health.” This model of transportation technology following culture is not one that has been applied to the development of the bicycle as urban transportation. It is, however just as applicable to the bicycle as to street railways, as the bicycle served to solve the same problems. A look at the geographical situation of the cyclists of New Orleans well illustrates the relationship.³¹

In New Orleans, the development of urban geography both followed the general pattern of urban expansion in the United States and exhibited characteristics particular to New Orleans’ cultural situation. The Anglo Protestants who immigrated to the city in the nineteenth century mainly settled on the upriver (of the Mississippi) side of Canal Street, separated from the old city, which was occupied by Creoles of both white and mixed race. The result was the creation of an "American Quarter" that over the decades extended upriver as the Creole suburbs developed downriver, so that New Orleans became ethnically divided in what historical geographer Richard Campanella calls "perhaps the greatest ethnic-geographical chasm in New Orleans history: the downtown Creoles and the uptown Anglos."³²

The first uptown suburb was the Garden District, developed between the 1830s and 1850s just upriver from the business district that had grown up directly across Canal street from the old city, now referred to as the French Quarter. In sharp contrast to the densely urban French Quarter, the Garden district was composed of large detached homes surrounded by greenery. According to commentator James Gill, the Garden District was settled by Americans who were

³¹ Clay McShane, *Down the Asphalt Path: The Automobile and the American City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 23.

³² Campanella, “The White Teapot” in *Bienville’s Dilemma: A Historical Geography of New Orleans*, 191.

appalled by the boisterous, drunken Latin culture of the Creoles and "preferred to devote their energies to the earnest pursuits of making money and establishing an opulent garden suburb uptown." His description may be something of a caricature, but the families that built homes in the Garden District largely comprised an Anglo class of merchants, bankers, and businessmen whose Victorian, wealth-seeking values clashed with those of the Creoles.³³

The Garden District was served and benefitted in further development by the New Orleans and Carrollton Railroad (later the St. Charles streetcar line), which in 1835 began running passenger trains along St. Charles Avenue from Canal Street all the way to the nearby town of Carrollton. The latter part of the century saw rapid housing development further upriver away from the city center. "In some cases," according to historical geographer Richard Campanella, "wealthy families departed their opulent townhouses because they lost their fortunes in the Civil War or struggled economically in its aftermath; in other cases they simply moved away from new urban nuisances and risks, and toward new amenities." As families and developers built homes beyond the Garden District and further upriver along St. Charles Avenue, the NO & CRR offered mule-drawn streetcar service with branch lines serving Napoleon and Louisiana avenues, two or three miles from the city center. The development of Audubon Park, five miles upriver from the city center, for the 1884 World's Industrial and Cotton Exposition inspired a building boom around it.³⁴

As these leafy suburbs of detached single-family dwellings unfolded farther and farther upriver, their residents became dependent on the street railways for transportation to and from

³³ Campanella, "The White Teapot" in *Bienville's Dilemma: A Historical Geography of New Orleans*, 186; Campanella, "The White Teapot," 290; James Gill, *Lords of Misrule: Mardi Gras and the Politics of Race in New Orleans* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 38-39; Campanella, "Antebellum Ethnic Geographies" in *Bienville's Dilemma*, 171.

³⁴ Campanella, "The Rise and Fall of the Immigrant Belt" *Bienville's Dilemma*, 175; E. Harper Charlton and Louis C. Hennick, *The Streetcars of New Orleans* (Gretna: Jackson Square Press: 2005), 7; Campanella, "The White Teapot," *Bienville's Dilemma*, 186.

the business center downriver. For some adventurous young people, the bicycle offered a better transportation solution, one that offered an independent, private form of travel free from the constrictions of routes and timetables. Thus the bicycle became popular with a set of young suburbanites who formed a second bicycle club, the Louisiana Cycling Club.

From the member list of the NOBC in the 1885 charter, it is possible to plot the geographic affinity of the earliest cycling club members of New Orleans. With the exception of a handful who lived in the French Quarter, these gentlemen occupied the Garden District, the oldest part of the "American Quarter." When the Louisiana Cycling club formed in 1887, the year of the paving of St. Charles and the Carnival lantern parade, membership was not only younger than that of the NOBC but was geographically different. Cross referencing the member list of the LCC from 1890, the height of the club's activity, with the *New Orleans City Directory*, we can see that while some members resided in or very close to the original Garden District, most of them lived farther or even much farther upriver along the St. Charles Avenue streetcar line and its branches (see figure 1). The membership of the LCC was made up largely of suburbanites. When the Louisiana Cycling Club built its opulent clubhouse in 1890, they built it on Octavia Street, at the far edge of the suburban development, the property bordered on one side by un-cleared forest (See figure 1).³⁵

A few members of the LCC were students at Tulane University, which was located downtown at the time. Most were clerks, stenographers, bookkeepers, and errand boys who worked in the business district. Connecting their places of school or employment with their suburban homes was St. Charles Avenue, along which the street railway and steam train connected the center and the booming suburbs. In 1887, four and a half miles of St. Charles

³⁵ *Bicycle South*, vol 8 no 5 (May 1886), 7. *Charter, By-Laws and Road Rules of the New Orleans Bicycle Club*, 21; Spokes, 16b and 31b; "Bicycling. The Louisiana Clubhouse," *Daily Picayune*, August 22, 1890; *New Orleans City Directory*.

Avenue was paved with asphalt from Canal Street to Napoleon Avenue, the first such paving in the city, creating a “wheelman’s highway.”³⁶



Figure 1. An 1885 Map of New Orleans. Ns represent residential addresses of members of the New Orleans Bicycle Club in 1885. Ls represent members of the Louisiana Cycling Club in 1890. An L with a circle represents a member who has a parent listed at the same residential address in the City Directory. Louisiana Cycling Club Spokes Scrapbook, accession 98-62-L, Williams Research Center, The Historic New Orleans Collection.

Not only did these young suburbanite men take to the bicycle as transportation, but they formed a subculture around it. As evidence of that subculture, the Louisiana Cycling Club left behind a large and richly valuable piece of evidence. Preserved at the Historic New Orleans Collection is a scrapbook of over one-hundred pages, compiled by members of the LCC over the

³⁶ “New Orleans Notes,” *The LAW Bulletin*, Feb 1887, 45.

course of its existence from 1887-1891. Pasted on its pages are hundreds of clipped articles as well as images and other ephemera. This scrapbook not only provides a trove of factual information but is a cultural object of representation that allows the historian insight into how this group constructed its identity within the larger culture.

Mass Media and the Construction of Group Identity

Scrapbooking was a common practice in this period. All kinds of people created scrapbooks for various purposes, according to historian Ellen Gruber Garvey. "Men and women from all classes and backgrounds, and with surprisingly diverse educations, did so for professional, domestic, educational, and political use and for many more reasons." The practice of scrapbooking was a reflection of how people consumed the cheap print media that proliferated after the Civil War. Newspapers and magazines traded and reprinted articles through a system of exchanges that allowed local publications to print news from all over the English-speaking world and also served as a system of communication. Through this communication system circulated news, short stories, poetry, and "household hints, information about word-origins, geographic one-liners, and scientific or historic or agricultural items." Exchange editors selected articles and other material they thought would interest their readers and assembled them in periodicals. As this flood of cheap periodicals passed quickly through readers' hands, they clipped material that related to their interests and assembled it in scrapbooks.³⁷

Victorian culture was disseminated and maintained through this mass print culture, which included not only periodicals but widely-printed manuals on child-rearing, etiquette, and household management. The early adopters of cycling in the late nineteenth century used print media to create an imagined community of cyclists, a Victorian subculture with its own sets of

³⁷ Ellen Gruber Garvey, *Writing with Scissors: American Scrapbooks from the Civil War to the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 10, 7, and 36.

values and goals. The cycling community's primary manual of protocols and standards was published in 1879 by Charles Pratt, the founder of the LAW. *The American Bicycler* created a uniformity among clubs that were geographically disparate, setting out detailed models for club charters, protocols for club rides, road rules to be observed, design of club uniforms, and rules and protocols for races.³⁸

As cycling clubs formed in nearly every city east of the Mississippi, they all seem to have more or less conformed to these standards. A look at the charter of the New Orleans Bicycle Club, formed two years after the publication of *The American Bicycler*, shows just how close its organizers followed the model set out by Pratt. For example, in Pratt's manual, Article II states:

The objects of this club shall be

- 1) The mutual enjoyment of its members in the pursuit of bicycling as a pastime; to which end, club-meets, tours, excursions, races, &c., shall be arranged and carried out.
- 2) The promotion (by force of example) of the use of the bicycle as a pastime and enjoyable aid to locomotion, by the general public.³⁹

The charter of the New Orleans Bicycle Club, formed two years after the publication of *The American Bicycler*, mimics this language, with variations:

Article II: object and purpose of club

- 1) The mutual enjoyment of its members in the pursuit of bicycling as a pastime, to which end Club meets, excursions, races, etc, shall be arranged and carried out and
- 2) The promotion (by force of example) of the use of the bicycle as a practicable and enjoyable aid to locomotion by the general public, and the use of its influence for improving and keeping improved the public roadways, and thereunder it is

³⁸ Daniel Walker Howe, "American Victorianism as a Culture," *American Quarterly* 27, no. 5 (December 1975):521-527; Thomas Burr argues that this imagined community also helped create a national consumer market for bicycles and accessories. Thomas Burr, "Building Community, Legitimizing Consumption: Creating the U.S. Bicycle Market, 1876-1884." *Socio-Economic Review* 4, no. 3 (September 2006): 417-446; Norcliffe, "Associations," 131; Charles Pratt, *The American Bicycler: A Maunual for the Observer, The Learner, and the Expert*, (Boston: Houghton, Osgood, and Company, 1879).

³⁹ Charles Pratt, *The American Bicycler: A Maunual for the Observer, The Learner, and the Expert*, (Boston: Houghton, Osgood, and Company, 1879), 171.

distinctively declared that the general welfare, and not the individual profit of the members, is the object for which said Club is organized and incorporated.⁴⁰

In keeping with the values of Victorian culture, early cycling clubs such as the NOBC conformed to Pratt's manual, seeking to propagate values of social responsibility, strict personal morality, and respect for standards. Glen Norcliffe's study of the Montreal Bicycle Club shows that club's adherence to these norms of Victorian propriety throughout the 1880s.⁴¹

In 1886, there were at least twenty-two periodicals dedicated to cycling in the English language. The most widely distributed of these were *The Wheelmen's Gazette*, *Bicycling World*, and the *LAW Bulletin*, a weekly journal distributed nationally to all members of the League of American Wheelmen, with a circulation of around ten thousand. In addition to these national publications were local and regional ones. In New Orleans, Hunter and Genslinger began printing the monthly *Bicycle South*, the official organ of the Louisiana Division of the LAW, in 1884. A surviving issue of *Bicycle South* from 1886 reflects the interests and concerns specific to the cycling community in New Orleans. The first is a lengthy article on the possibility of the League dividing the country into regional racing divisions. Reprinted from the *Daily States*, a local newspaper, is a set of heated exchanges regarding young cyclists riding dangerously on the city's sidewalks. Two articles concern long-distance touring: one about touring in the South and another about a cyclist riding from New York to San Francisco. Another article concerns the new road to be built in Chalmette, at the downriver end of New Orleans, an idea favored by cyclists looking for new roads to take them out into the countryside. In the middle of one page, the Louisiana Division of the LAW published its member list for 1886, with the direct address, "For League President, Burley B. Ayers." Other articles include notices intended for the members of the New Orleans Bicycle Club and dispatches from other cycling clubs from around the South.

⁴⁰ *Charter, By-Laws, and Road Rules of the N.O. Bicycle Club*, 4-5.

⁴¹ Norcliffe, "Associations."

Also reprinted is the latest dispatch from Thomas Stevens, who was making his famous cycling journey around the world and was at the time in Asia Minor. The paper also contains a good deal of advertising for other cycling journals and distributors of bicycles and accessories.⁴²

Through a blend of locally generated content and nationally circulated clippings, *Bicycle South* maintained a local community that also functioned within a larger national community. Having access to many issues would be helpful in understanding how that local community was similar to and different from the national one, and how the cycling subculture of New Orleans might have evolved as a younger generation of cyclists came of age. Unfortunately, this one issue might be the only surviving one. However, dozens of articles from *Bicycle South* as well as many other publications of that period, including newspapers and cycling magazines, have survived because the members of the LCC clipped them and pasted them into their scrapbook. The scrapbook reveals an active engagement with mass media in the construction of a group identity within a larger community, and it can be read as a text intended to express the collective identity of the Louisiana Cycling Club.

The Spokes Scrapbook

In creating the scrapbook, which they titled *Spokes*, members of the Louisiana Cycling Club collected clippings and cut out images from *Bicycle South*, *LAW Bulletin*, and many other publications. The act of titling the book is an indication that it was meant as a cohesive text rather than just a collection of materials. The clippings abound with stories about themselves, written by themselves, as well as the activities of other clubs, reports of the national racing scene, and tales of pioneers traveling astounding distances by bicycle as well as reports of the races held in New Orleans, recreational outings, and social events. Arranged alongside these

⁴² Karl Kron, *Ten Thousand Miles on a Bicycle* (New York: Emil Rosenblatt, 1982, Orig. pub. by Karl Kron, 1887), 654; *Bicycle South*, May 1886.

clippings are bits of clipped media: poetry about bicycles, images of men and women riding bicycles, images of themselves, humorous cartoons concerning cycling, and images of bicycles and cycling accessories clipped from advertisements.



Figure 2. A page from the Spokes scrapbook, which includes an article with woodcut about LCC member Ben Cason, photographs of men with bicycles, and several illustrations. Louisiana Cycling Club Spokes Scrapbook, accession 98-62-L, Williams Research Center, The Historic New Orleans Collection.

Young adults during this period, according to Ellen Gruber Garvey's recent study, assembled scrapbooks to help define and express their identities in the developing youth culture. While some scrapbooks expressed individuality, for young adults the assembling of memorabilia scrapbooks often marked entry into group identities and experiences. As a composition of the materials of mass media, such as advertising cards and product wrappers, with items that documented the social activities of the club, Spokes is an example of this type of scrapbook. The

Spokes scrapbook represents the group experiences and identity of a youth subculture that existed within the late Victorian culture of New Orleans.⁴³

The contents of the scrapbook offers insight into how this group of young Victorians viewed themselves in relation to the culture they had inherited from their parents, and how they were experiencing and responding to the world as American Victorian society in New Orleans entered the modern era. The effort to construct a cohesive group identity may itself have been a direct response to the psychological ills of modernity, in which identity shifted and fragmented unsettlingly in the bureaucratized market culture. As Jackson Lears describes:

For many, individual identities began to seem fragmented, diffuse, perhaps even unreal. A weightless culture of material comfort and spiritual blandness was breeding weightless persons who longed for intense experience to give some definition, some distinct outline and substance to their vaporous lives.⁴⁴

The problem that the bicycle addressed for these young cyclists was not only a pragmatic one of geography but a psychological one, the crisis of spirituality and general malaise experienced by Victorian culture as it approached the realities of *fin de siècle* modernity.⁴⁵

The urbanized bourgeoisie of the late nineteenth century was experiencing a crisis that had both public and private dimensions. Publicly, as discussed above, they feared a loss cultural authority as waves of immigrants arrived from Europe, bringing with them foreign cultures and Catholic religion and swelling the numbers and power of an urban immigrant and laboring class. Feeding this anxiety was the fear that middle class society had become “over civilized” and effete. The prospect of autonomous achievement and self-realization had withered in the beauractatized market economy in which self-reliance had been subsumed in interdependence.

⁴³ Ellen Gruber Garvey, *Writing with Scissors: American Scrapbooks from the Civil War to the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 16.

⁴⁴ Lears, 32.

⁴⁵ Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

At the same time, Victorian culture had become not only physically but emotionally stifling. In general, the dictates of Victorian propriety prohibited displays of emotion. Also, as Protestantism liberalized and accommodated secular ideas of existence, it lost its emotional power. As Jackson Lears sums up the situation:

For the late-Victorian bourgeoisie, intense experience—whether physical or emotional—seemed a lost possibility. There was no longer the opportunity for bodily testing provided by rural life, no longer the swift alternation of despair and exhilaration which characterized the old-style Protestant conversion. There was only the diffuse fatigue produced by a day of office work or social calls.⁴⁶

“Neuresthenia” was the ailment of the age—a state of depression, anxiety, and mental and physical weakness believed to be caused by the conditions of modernity, including overwork, emotional suppression, and over civilization.⁴⁷

The bicycle provided antidote for these ills in a multitude of ways. It offered not only physical exercise but a means of getting away from the city and into the healthful and restorative countryside. As a competitive sport, bicycle racing offered young men an opportunity to compete for dominance through individual achievement. As one writer opined in a clipping preserved in the scrapbook: “In this progressive age, the inveterate desire of man is to obtain a healthy frame and an invincible constitution. Hence the invention of the bicycle.” Another clipping reads, “What more health-giving, nerve building tonic has mechanical skill and science given the over-worked mortal of to-day than that boon of mankind—the cycle? What a feeling of invigoration! What a sense of freedom from all worldly annoyances!” As another writer muses, “. . . with the cool air blowing around the rider’s face, he forgets business and its cares, he is as free as a bird .

⁴⁶ Lears, 48.

⁴⁷ Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 86-87.

...” Thus the bicycle, a thoroughly modern object, served also as antidote to the problems of modernity.⁴⁸



Figure 3. An illustration of a cyclist resting in bucolic scenery. Louisiana Cycling Club Spokes Scrapbook, accession 98-62-L, Williams Research Center, The Historic New Orleans Collection.

Such sentiments regarding the bicycle’s value for both physical and mental health were common to the national culture of the bicycle. Another common feature to the LCC and other American cycling clubs of the period, including the NOBC, was an ideation that substituted bicycles for horses. However, the bicycle had not replaced the horse as transportation. As urban historians Clay McShane and Joel Tarr have pointed out, urban dwellers did not ride horseback around the late nineteenth-century city. For one thing, it was not acceptable to arrive at one’s place of business smelling of horse. Also, horses were very difficult to control in an urban

⁴⁸ Spokes, 61a, 32b, and 43b.

environment, subject to theft, and very expensive to stable in the city, where real estate was precious.⁴⁹

Rather, the bicycle served as a substitute for the horse in their chivalric fantasies. American cycling clubs of the 1880s explicitly mimicked cavalry rides and drills. The officers of the club included a Captain, Lieutenants, a Guide, and a Bugler. A drill written by the captain of the NOBC, published in an 1886 issue of *Bicycle South*, uses terminology such as “right dress” and “mount.” The seat of the bicycle was referred to as a “saddle” (and still is). The cyclists, arranged in strict formation of columns and files, was commanded by the bugler. The first official League tournament held in New Orleans, in 1885, included not only races for speed but ring tilting, a Medieval equestrian game. The Spokes scrapbook contains ample evidence that these sorts of fantasies were central to the culture of the club. Bicycles were referred to as “skeleton horses,” “shadow steeds,” and “the iron horse.” Club members named their bicycles as if they were horses, giving them monikers such as “Mabel,” “Pixie,” and “Rats.” One image in the book actually depicts the bicycle as a horse, ridden by a character in Medieval dress. (See figure 4.) These chivalric fantasies fulfilled a yearning for an idealized past and the desire to recapture the physical vigor and romance lost to modern urban life.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Clay McShane and Joel A. Tarr, “The Centrality of the Horse in the Nineteenth-Century American City” in *The Making of Urban America*, 2nd edition, ed. Raymond A. Mohl (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc, 1997) 105.

⁵⁰ *Bicycle South*, 11; Spokes, 42b and 16a.



Figure 4. An illustration of a bicycle depicted as a horse, ridden by a character in Medieval dress. Louisiana Cycling Club Spokes Scrapbook, accession 98-62-L, Williams Research Center, The Historic New Orleans Collection.

The contents of the Spokes scrapbook offer evidence that the members of the Louisiana Cycling Club sought not only a tonic to the ills of modernity but liberation from the Victorian culture of their parents. One bit of evidence of the LCC's distancing itself from mainstream Victorian culture is its charter. As pointed out previously, the language of the NOBC's charter is very close to that dictated by *The American Bicyclist*, reflecting a desire to adhere to the Victorian standards hierarchy and order of the national cycling club culture. The LCC's charter, filed in 1889, does not do this. Instead, it reads:

The objects and purposes of this Corporation is established and declared to be: to extend knowledge of the Scientific and practical laws and principles of the Cycle: the establishment of a Library for the use, Convenience and instruction of its

members and, to Secure Such benefits as arise from Corporate Association, established by Law.⁵¹

This language, as well as the rest of the charter, follows the boilerplate incorporation language used when clubs were legally incorporated, and my suspicion is that the purpose of incorporating the club at all was to allow it to buy land and finance the building of their clubhouse. However, motivation for the decision to incorporate themselves as a scientific, rather than an athletic, club is not at all apparent through the hundreds of clippings in the scrapbook that describe the club's activities. The only help the scrapbook offers here is that, given the general tone of the club and their penchant for antics, it could well have been a joke.

The age and generation difference between the LCC and the NOBC is apparent in the language used by LCC, as they repeatedly characterized themselves as being young, sometimes referring to themselves as "the Little Children":

What's the matter with A.M. Hill's five mile races? Only one has been run. Carey won that. And some of the "Little Children" are even now on the war path looking for his scalp.⁵²

The LCC house scheme is on the boom, and the "Little Children" expect to give the "New Orleans Bicycle Champs" an invite to their first "smoker" [a men's party] at an an early date.⁵³

The LCC is still trudging along and notwithstanding the fact that the annual election takes place next month, everything seems tranquil among the "Little Children."⁵⁴

While the NOBC embodied Victorian ideals of propriety and gentlemanly conduct, the LCC embraced playfulness and disorder. The young men who formed the club might have been

⁵¹ Charter of the Louisiana Cycling Club, Parish of Orleans, Act. No. 1412, April 18, 1889. G.W. Christy, Notary, Parish of Orleans. vol 10 (1887-1891).

⁵² Spokes, 46b.

⁵³ Spokes, 53a.

⁵⁴ Spokes, 54a.

the subject of that heated exchange in *Bicycle South* the year before the club formed. A writer signing himself "Indignant Citizen" had written to the *Daily States*:

Young dude bicyclists seem to think the sidewalks up town, as well as the streets, are their special highways. Last evening, just after dark, when Jackson street was crowded, these young dudes occupied the sidewalk, racing, singing out "get out of the way," and would have run into an old lady but for the presence of her daughter, who gave one of them a shove, intending to upset him, at which the young blood laughed.

The reply printed in the *South* read:

No member of the New Orleans Bicycle Club rides upon the sidewalks up town, nor do they maliciously startle people, old or young, in the manner described by your ready-made "Indignant." Their interests demand a strict observance of decorum on the road, and a conciliatory, rather than an antagonizing policy.⁵⁵

Composed a few years later, a hand-written flyer advertising an excursion of the LCC bears a drawing of a policeman running with club outstretched and a humorous reference, mocking the speech of the stereotyped Irish policeman, that suggests a rebellious sense of levity on the issue (See figure 5):

Git off that sidewalk. I'm after yez, Be God! I hear yez don't roide with thim LCC Byes. It's tellin yez I am, ev yez want to kape in with me an' have a good toime too, jist yez go with thim nixt Sunday.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ *Bicycle South*, May 1886, 6.

⁵⁶ *Spokes*, 17a1.

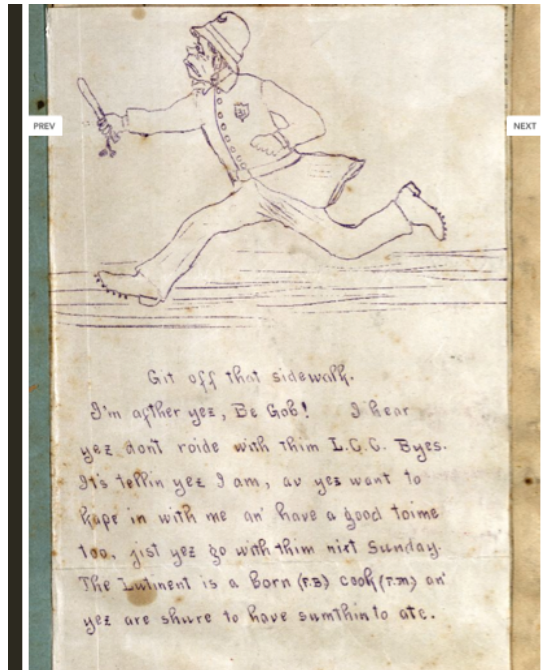


Figure 5. A hand-drawn illustration of a policeman decorates a flyer advertising an excursion of the LCC. Louisiana Cycling Club Spokes Scrapbook, accession 98-62-L, Williams Research Center, The Historic New Orleans Collection.

In missives sent to *Bicycle South* and other publications, both national and local, the LCC reported their exploits in a tone of boisterousness that ran counter to the Victorian propriety of their parents. "Five of the LCC went on a voyage last Saturday and discovered a branch of Bayou Labarre, which they named Bayou Cason, from the fact that Ben Cason received an involuntary immersion in limpid waters." Some of the more colorful missives were penned by "Bettsy B," the female character and *non de plume* of R.G. Betts, who founded the club at age eighteen. This one celebrates both gluttony and a lack of decorum in eating:

The club run Wednesday night brought a jolly crowd to the Carrolton [sic] roost and it was as good as a picnic to see the how the poor, inoffensive melons were slaughtered. Watermelon Hobson had no trouble in earning the title and is clearly entitled to the watermelon championship for 1888, he winning hands down but with jaws aworking. Jeff Frederic and George Angrams didn't say much, but ye gods—(N.B:Jeff needed paragoric that night.) Mal Graham and George Johnston were modest and returned to a dark corner, but the sundry sounds and fragments

of closely eaten rind that came whistling through the still night air testified that the two were getting into their work.⁵⁷

When the work on the club's lavish clubhouse at the edge of the upriver suburban development of the city was completed, they threw a huge "smoker" (a men's party). The scrapbook contains several clippings reporting the festivities, which included plenty of beer and performances by many of the members:

Mr. McCartney sang, Mr. Sherrouse gave a splendid representation in pantomine [sic], Mr. F.M. Cook gave a solo on the audiophone. Mr. R.W. Abbott recited an Italian piece, and as an encore addressed the club. Mr. G.W. Christy, the oldest member in the club, and being the first honorary member elected, spoke very prettily about the past, present and future of the club. Mr. Hathorn and Grivot played a duet. Mr. Blaney Walsh played a piano solo. Prof. Bouge played the Dude's March and during the evening gave a wrestling match by himself, and also a representation of a man walking down a crowded street trying to read a paper. Mr. G. Faure danced a jig. Messrs. Fenner, Bogel, and Grivot played in a trio, and gave some delightful selections, while Charlie Fenner whistled, and gave a pantomine [sic] representation. Prof. Sadlier treated the crowd to some flip flops and club swinging. ... The beer gave out twice, and the sandwiches lasted about a half hour, while the lemonade was nowhere, although there must have been about two barrels of the latter article. ... Babe Cason was the Cigarette Committee, and carried a box of cigarettes around in one hand and a lighted candle in the other, while on his back appeared a big sign, "No Smoking."⁵⁸

This beer-fueled, rule-mocking mirthfulness ran directly counter to late Victorian values of order and sobriety. It also reflected the significant crossover between members of the LCC and the amateur theater scene in New Orleans. Several members of the club were noted theatrical performers.

The playful youthfulness of the LCC appears to have been central to the group consciousness. An 1891 flyer advertises an upcoming excursion to Bay St. Louis, for which the club took a train to the beach resort to hold a road race on the shell road there. The image on the flyer is of a group of elf-like children in stockings stacked acrobatically on a high wheel bicycle,

⁵⁷ Spokes, 5b.

⁵⁸ Spokes, 13a.

headed by the caption “We, Are The People.” (See figure 6.) The image evokes not only youth but a sense of childish playfulness. These elven children appear in other images, apparently clipped from a newspaper or magazine, pasted in the book, in which they are depicted riding various animals. (See figure 7). That the LCC chose to appropriate these child images to represent themselves is significant, as it reflects not only a rebellion against Victorian propriety but a resistance to modern culture, a strain of dissent that cultural historian Jackson Lears has termed “antimodernism.”



Figure 6. A card advertising an excursion of the LCC to Biloxi. Louisiana Cycling Club Spokes Scrapbook, accession 98-62-L, Williams Research Center, The Historic New Orleans Collection.



Figure 7. Illustrations of elven children riding animals. Louisiana Cycling Club Spokes Scrapbook, accession 98-62-L, Williams Research Center, The Historic New Orleans Collection.

According to Lears, this resistance manifested in a variety of ways, several of which can be seen through the subculture of the Louisiana Cycling Club, including chivalric fantasies, the seeking of “intense experience,” idealization of childhood, and appropriation of premodern cultures. “The innocent child was a vision of psychic wholeness, a simple ‘genuine self’ in a world where selfhood had become problematic and sincerity obsolete.” Fearing themselves “over civilized,” Victorians at the end of the nineteenth century “embraced the child's capacity for unrepressed emotional and imaginative experience.” Thus, the LCC also represented themselves through the appropriation of the imagery and literature of the premodern, or “the childhood of the race.” Victorians viewed as “premodern” and childish all cultures “which did not conform to

the model of Western industrial capitalism,” which included both Medieval and Oriental cultures.⁵⁹

The pages of the Spokes scrapbook reflect an appropriation of the premodern in ways that are often humorous and ironic. For example, the face of Harry Hodgson, one of the club's founders, is pasted over an image of a Medieval knight⁶⁰ (See figure 8.) Several cartoons pasted in the book juxtapose a quote from Shakespeare with an illustration that interprets the line to be about cycling. For example, one illustration shows the character of a king riding a bicycle, with the caption, "I'll fetch a turn about the garden," a line from the play *Cymbeline*. Another reads: "Let go thy hold when a great wheel runs down a hill," from *King Lear* (See figures 9 and 10.) Several clippings alter Shakespeare verses to make them about cycling:

To ride or not to ride, that is the question,
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and guys of men of better fortune
Or to raise the money with a deal of trouble
And buy a bicycle and end them.

Many other such appropriations of famous poetry occur in clippings throughout the book. This verse is attributed to Tennyson:

His nickeled cycle glittered free,
Like to some stars we see Hung in the golden galaxy.
His cycle bell rang merrily
 As he rode doen Camelot;
And from his blazoned baldric slung
A wheelman's silver bugle hung,
and as he rode his bike-song rung
 Beside remote Shalott.

⁵⁹ Lears, 146-147.

⁶⁰ Spokes, 63b.

This is an alteration of a verse from Alfred Lloyd Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalott*, a Victorian poem based on a Medieval legend. The cycling poetry they clipped and pasted sometimes imitates Shakespearian-era language:

Behold how fleeting are the days of man's enjoyment!
How numerous are the days of his sorrow and depression, and how few
are those red-letter days of which he can truly say they bring him naught but
pleasure
In the morning of his existence he groweth impatient and longeth to go
faster than a walk.
He coaxeth and imploreth his dad to purchase a bicycle until he is made
the possessor of a machine of the vintage of war times.⁶¹

These superimpositions of themselves and the bicycle are indicative of the tendency to appropriation of the premodern in the construction of the club's self-image.



Figure 8. The image of Henry Hodgson's head, cut from a photograph, is pasted over an illustration of a Medieval knight character. Louisiana Cycling Club Spokes Scrapbook, accession 98-62-L, Williams Research Center, The Historic New Orleans Collection.

⁶¹ Spokes, 55a.

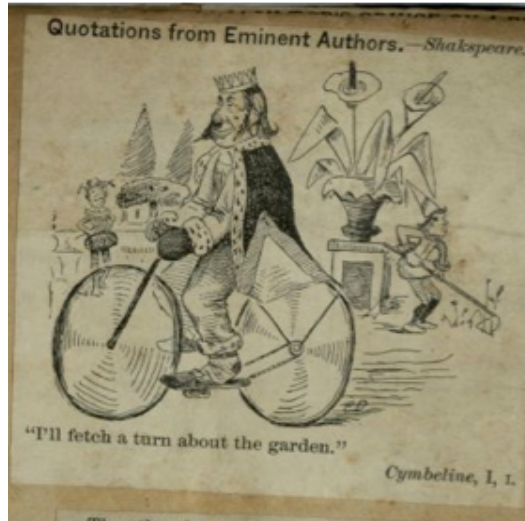


Figure 9. A quote from Shakespeare illustrated with a character riding a bicycle. Louisiana Cycling Club Spokes Scrapbook, accession 98-62-L, Williams Research Center, The Historic New Orleans Collection.



Figure 10. A quote from Shakespeare illustrated with a character riding a bicycle. Louisiana Cycling Club Spokes Scrapbook, accession 98-62-L, Williams Research Center, The Historic New Orleans Collection.

The scrapbook also contains many images of young women, some of them with bicycles but most of them pasted in gratuitously as decoration. Many, though certainly not all, of the

images show women wearing in risqué dress, including one in which a woman sits atop a high wheel bicycle. (See figure 10.)

One image is of a woman wearing a kimono and carrying a Japanese umbrella. The woman in the image is blonde-haired and appears European rather than Japanese, but the image is clearly an Oriental image. (See figure 11.) On another page is an image of a grand and elaborate trophy, and written by hand under it: "Presented by the Mikado of Japan to The Louisiana Cycling Club for Fine Attendance of Club Runs." (See figure 12.)⁶²



Figure 11. A woman sits atop a high wheel bicycle wearing a corset and tights. Louisiana Cycling Club Spokes Scrapbook, accession 98-62-L, Williams Research Center, The Historic New Orleans Collection.

⁶² The Mikado referred to is that of the popular opera of the time, *The Mikado*, the Gilbert and Sullivan comic opera. First performed in New York in 1885, *The Mikado* gave new life to an American fascination with things Japanese. Josephine Lee, *The Japan of Pure Invention Gilbert and Sullivan's The Mikado* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 3.



Figure 12. A blonde-haired woman dressed in a kimono and carrying a Japanese-style umbrella. Louisiana Cycling Club Spokes Scrapbook, accession 98-62-L, Williams Research Center, The Historic New Orleans Collection.



Figure 13. An illustration of an elaborate trophy, with the text "Presented by the Mikado of Japan to The Louisiana Cycling Club for Fine Attendance of Club Runs," arranged next to a Century Club ribbon and Japanese script. Louisiana Cycling Club Spokes Scrapbook, accession 98-62-L, Williams Research Center, The Historic New Orleans Collection.

This same premodern imagery was on display in the Carnival lantern parade of 1887, the organizers (and many participants) of which would later that year form the Louisiana Cycling Club. Represented in the parade were The Mikado along with Nanki Poo, surrounded by Oriental imagery, as well as Romeo, a character from the Shakespeare play *Romeo and Juliet*, and a number of representations from Medieval literature that evoked the premodern imaginations of the Victorian middle class. This appropriation of premodern, non-Anglo imagery reflected a current of Victorian cultural dissent that, as Lears has described, began in the 1880s. However, such appropriation had begun in New Orleans much earlier than that. The bicycle lantern parade was a novelty, but the idea of Anglo Protestants holding a Carnival parade was already three decades old.⁶³

By the middle of the nineteenth century, Anglo Protestants had established economic and political control over the Catholic Creoles in New Orleans. The only thing left under the control of the Creoles was Carnival, the Latin Catholic festival of street revelry and masquerade balls that preceded the fasting season of Lent. On the evening of Mardi Gras (the final, climactic day of the Carnival season) 1857, a group of Uptown businessmen conspired to seize Carnival from the Creoles and impose upon the holiday their own ideas of social order. That year, the newly-formed Mistick Krewe of Comus staged a parade through the city with two lavishly decorated floats and bands of martial music before filing into their exclusive ball. The city was mesmerized. “Comus had suddenly co-opted the masked ball, which once entertained all classes of Creole, and made it an emblem for an emerging elite determined to keep the rest of the

⁶³ The Mikado referred to is that of the popular opera of the time, *The Mikado*, the Gilbert and Sullivan comic opera. First performed in New York in 1885, *The Mikado* gave new life to an American fascination with things Japanese. Josephine Lee, *The Japan of Pure Invention Gilbert and Sullivan's The Mikado* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 3.

population at one remove.” Two more Anglo-dominated krewes—Momus and Rex—appeared in 1872. The king of Rex was declared to be the king of Carnival. From then on, Anglos and their krewes, the members drawn from the most elite of uptown Anglo society, dominated Carnival. Through its Carnival organizations, the Anglo elite imposed its values of order, hierarchy, and planning upon a ritual that formerly celebrated just the opposite. Thus Victorian culture achieved dominance in New Orleans through the stunningly successful appropriation of a Catholic ritual. While also changing their own culture in a process of amalgamation that would continue for decades to come. This amalgamation is apparent in the subculture of the LCC.⁶⁴

Cultural Amalgamation

The young Victorians of New Orleans were distinct from their counterparts in other American cities in their proximity to a non-Anglo culture that had recently been dominant. Proximity to and amalgamation with non-Anglo culture could explain the counter-Victorian tendencies of the Louisiana Cycling Club. The idea that Creoles and Anglos in the nineteenth century were sharply divided—geographically along Canal street—or even culturally, has been disputed by historians. Joseph Tregle has suggested that the Anglos when they first arrived were at least somewhat amenable to Creole culture, finding it “pristine in its simplicity, almost childlike in its lack of ostentation and class consciousness.” Historical geographer Richard Campanella has pointed out that, by the end of the nineteenth century, the Anglo and French cultures of New Orleans had amalgamated in such a way that disappointed travelers expecting a sharp divide between two distinct cultures. “The French society is not exactly what it was at the change of government, & the American is not strictly what it is in the Atlantic cities.” And as Reid Mitchell has argued, “To a certain extent, Americans ‘Americanized’ New Orleans and its

⁶⁴ James Gill, 44-45; Reid Mitchell, *All on a Mardi Gras Day: Episodes in the History of New Orleans Carnival* (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press: 1999), 60.

Creoles. To a certain extent, New Orleans “creolized” the Americans. The spectacle of Creole-American Carnival . . . represents the creation of a New Orleans culture neither entirely Creole nor entirely American.” Even as Victorians established cultural dominance in New Orleans, they absorbed and adapted to the non-Anglo culture.⁶⁵

Norcliffe has pointed out that, judging from the strictly Anglo names of its members in 1885, the Montreal Bicycle Club was the exclusive preserve of the Anglo elite, despite the fact that Montreal, due to a migration of French-Canadians from the countryside, was becoming increasingly Francophone while also experiencing an influx of Jewish, Italian, and Polish immigrants. The 1885 role of the New Orleans Bicycle Club includes a few non-Anglo names, including Gonzalez (Spanish), O’Reardon (Irish), and Beltran and Hughes (French). The names of the members of the LCC reveal even more ethnic diversity. Surnames of the 1890 membership includes the German names Gruber, Gruenwald, and Bogel and a number of Irish surnames, including Consadine, Graham, McCartney, Nolan, O’Beirne, and O’Reardon. Most notable though is the number of French surnames, including Delahoussaye, Faure, Bouchereau, Renaud, Henriques, Phelan, Frederic, Exnicious, Grivot, Guidemett, and Levert. Those with French surnames were not necessarily Creoles. As they resided uptown, it is far more likely that they were “foreign French,” French-speaking immigrants who arrived in New Orleans after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, or descendants thereof. Nevertheless, they were of the Gallic community, and their association with the Anglo elite through the LCC indicates an ethnic plurality within that organization that set it apart from others of its kind in the United States.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Tregle, 157; Benjamin Latrobe, qtd. in Campanella, “Streetscapes of Amalgamation,” *Bienville’s Dilemma*, 269; Mitchell, 27.

⁶⁶ Norcliffe, *The Ride to Modernity*, 188; The “foreign French” immigrants came to New Orleans both from France and as refugees from Saint-Domingue. Campanella, “Creolism and Place” in *Bienville’s Dilemma*, 162; Paul L. LaChance, “The Foreign French” in *Creole New Orleans*, 122.

Other evidence of this amalgamation lies in the attitude towards riding on Sundays. Glen Norcliffe has noted that the Anglo Protestant members of the Montreal Bicycle Club did not ride at all on Sundays in keeping of the Sabbath.⁶⁷ In New Orleans American immigrants had at first been offended by the Creole custom of using Sunday as "a day of relaxed pleasure." By the 1880s, however, attitudes had changed. Both the NOBC and the LCC regularly held club rides as well as races on Sundays. There apparently was some objection to Sunday club activities, as evidenced by this clipping:

“Wonder if these spasms of white washed Christianity (?) are contagious? There is little question but that the restful and harmless ripple of excitement caused by Sunday cycle riding, such as engaged in hereabouts, is productive of far less evil sin than a deck of cards, stack of chips and a keg of beer is apt to produce in some clubs that would foster and encouraged outdoor recreation, but not by Sunday racing—horrors!”

Such objections occurred in the context of the debate over the Louisiana Sunday Law of 1886. Passed by the state legislature in Baton Rouge, the Louisiana Sunday Law of 1886 was an attempt to impose observance of the Sabbath by banning the sale of alcohol and restricting other activities on Sundays. Similar laws were being passed, at the behest of Protestant social reformers, all over the country. It was unpopular with the people of New Orleans, who resented having the Protestant morality of the rest of the state imposed upon them. Another clipping pasted alongside that one clarifies that the LCC was not disinterested in Christianity:

“A sport so pure, so gentlemanly that it needs not the influence of money, of pool rooms or of bookmaker to keep alive is worthy the encouragement of any Christian. And such is amateur cycle racing.⁶⁸”

Rather, it would seem, their concept of Christian values and proper Christian behavior had shifted to a more liberal view, at least of the Sabbath, than their Anglo Protestant counterparts in

⁶⁷ Norcliffe, *The Ride to Modernity*, 197.

⁶⁸ Spokes, 9a.

the rest of the country. Such shifts in attitude reflect a counter-Victorian bent in the ethos of the LCC which, comprised of both Anglo and non-Anglo members, embodied the cultural pluralism of New Orleans as Anglo Protestants, Creoles, and European immigrants negotiated the creation of a shared culture.⁶⁹

Exclusion and Dominance

This shared culture that the LCC occupied, while inclusive of non-Anglos, did have boundaries that served both to exclude nonwhites and exert class dominance. As Mitchell points out, “Beneficially, this division [between American and French] would be overcome by a cultural exchange between Americans and Creoles. Poisonously, it was resolved also by a shared racism that became New Orleans’s greatest source of unrest. The French and English split paled next to this racial division within the city.” This exclusion was made explicit by the tussle between cycling club members, including those of both the NOBC and the LCC, and the League of American Wheelmen over the admission of African Americans by League affiliated clubs in the North. Nearly ever member of the Louisiana Division of the League resigned membership over the dispute. Once it was resolved in favor of the southerners, Ritchie Betts, founder of the LCC and cycling journalist, wrote:

Speaking of the league, now that the 'negro admission' bugaboo has been laid aside, there is every probability that the Louisiana division will be reorganized almost immediately. There are about six members remaining. When it was proposed to admit negroes to the order in the north the southern members objected and the members in this state began to drop off. Now that the color line has been drawn, it is expected that a change for the better will ensue.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Tregle, 149; Gill, 34.

⁷⁰ “Wheelmen Work for Good Roads. A New Orleans Cyclist, Who Rode Over the Continent, Compares,” *Daily Picayune*, Feb 2, 1894.

This exclusion was characteristic of all athletic clubs at the time, as all tolerance for interracial sports disappeared in the last fifteen years of the nineteenth century.⁷¹

Mentions and portrayals of African-Americans and immigrants in the clippings found in the Spokes scrapbook ridicule their ignorance of the bicycle, apparently as a mark of inferiority.

For example, one cyclist's report of a ride in the country contains this pair of anecdotes:

About five miles out of Bogue Chitto, while coasting down a hill I saw an old negro woman going to "meetin." She was at the bottom and I the top. When I made the foot of the hill, I looked for the old woman--Well, there was no old woman, only a pink dress tearing through the woods like a streak of greased lightening. Another time I met an old negro man; he says to me, 'Fo de' Lord mister, I thought you was a spirit." He was badly frightened too.

A clipping of a cartoon shows an African-American woman attempting to install a high wheel bicycle over a window. The caption reads, "Ach the stoopidness of some folks is perfectly amazin'. The idee aw misses buyin' a round fly scrane an expectin' it to fit a square windy."

Another clipping is a column by Mary Agnes Thompson, a New Orleans writer who was known for her "dialect stories."⁷² The story is one of Thompson's "Aunt Tilda" stories, which portray fictional conversations between her and an old African-American woman.

"Dar is one on 'em now. Look quick, Miss Mary! What yer call dem air things, ennyhow--centerpedes?"
I turned quickly and saw a bicycle and rider flash past. "That's a bicycle."
"Good Lor', dat ole Ephrem, es hes de slippery tongue, he dun tole me day wus centerpedes."
"Maybe he said they were velocipedes?"
"What's de diffunce, losipede or centerpede, sense he dun tole me er lie-- what yer call 'em, icicles?"⁷³

⁷¹ Mitchell, 28; Somers, 286.

⁷² Spokes, 68b; "A Tough Ride," clipping in Spokes; May W. Mount, *Some Notables of New Orleans: Biographical and Descriptive Sketches of the Artists of New Orleans, and Their Work* (New Orleans: May W. Mount, 1896), 74.

⁷³ Spokes, 12b.

The story goes on as "Aunt Tilda" tells of her encounters with bicycles and her reactions of fear and dismay. Such portrayals of African Americans worked to reinforce white racial superiority. The mocking of those ignorant of or opposed to the bicycle extended also to immigrants and the working class. The hand-drawing of the policeman discussed earlier is both a playful reference to the club members' unruliness and, through its use of caricatured dialect, a mocking of the Irish policeman stereotype.⁷⁴

Women, however, were not subject to exclusion, at least not by the Louisiana Cycling Club. The young women of Uptown society were great fans of the cycling races, and outnumbered men in the stands at the tournaments two to one. The LCC held frequent ladies' socials at their clubhouse. Women were also not only allowed but whole-heartedly encouraged both to ride bicycles and to join the LCC. It appears that the women themselves were at first reluctant:

It seems as though it will be a long time before the ladies of New Orleans overcome their prejudice against the wheel. We have at present only about three or four ladies who ride, though we have miles of asphalt and many other good surfaces to ride upon. The trouble seems to be that the ladies think it immodest and until this feeling is overcome the number of ladies riding will be rather small. It is a pity too.⁷⁵

Later, however, the women of New Orleans caught on, according to another clipping. "We are glad to see ladies of New Orleans taking such a fancy to cycling. Most any evening one can see several ladies either mounted on a single or a double riding on St. Charles Avenue, seeming to enjoying the sport hugely."⁷⁶ In 1890, the LCC happily admitted their first female member, Belle Fairchild, the sister of one member, Charlie Fairchild. She was a well-known actress in amateur

⁷⁴ May W. Mount, *Some Notables of New Orleans: Biographical and Descriptive Sketches of the Artists of New Orleans, and Their Work* (New Orleans: May W. Mount, 1896), 74.

⁷⁵ Spokes, 16b.

⁷⁶ Spokes, 26a.

theater, and had performed as Yum-Yum in a production of *The Mikado*, in 1887, the year of the Carnival parade. She eventually married another member of the club, Claus Bogel, who participated in the Carnival parade dressed as a ballerina, and was also active in the theater scene.⁷⁷

Conclusion

Cycling clubs first appeared in New Orleans at the same time and through the same cultural mechanisms as in other American cities. The New Orleans Bicycle Club was an essentially Victorian institution, its founders acting as part of the larger national Victorian culture of which they were members. As Anglo Protestant entrepreneurs of the commercial elite, they took to the bicycle as means of gentlemanly recreation, and formed the NOBC as an elite social group through which to reinforce Victorian values of hierarchy and social order and express class dominance. Their club culture adhered to norms set out by and disseminated through mass print culture.

A few years later, the bicycle caught on with a younger set. The club that they formed, the Louisiana Cycling Club, filled the same function of both race and class exclusivity while eschewing Victorian values of order and respectability. The LCC actively engaged with mass print media in constructing this subculture within an emerging youth culture. Participation in the club offered members of the LCC means to develop a sense of cohesive group identity along the lines of not only a shared interest but shared experience. Those “intense experiences” imbued their lives with a sense of meaning and provided respite from the conditions of Victorian culture as it met with urban modernity. Through the Spokes scrapbook, we see that the Louisiana Cycling Club took on a counter-Victorian ethos that contrasted with other such cycling clubs of

⁷⁷ Spokes, 65b and 11b; *Daily Picayune*, Jan 21, 1896; *Daily Picayune*, February 9, 1887; March 31, 1889; Spokes, 19a.1.

the era, including the New Orleans Cycling Club and the Montreal Cycling Club, which were bastions of Victorianism.

The young members of the LCC sought not only intense experiences, but those that rejected Victorian respectability. Their appropriation of premodern imagery reflected a discomfort with modernity and a yearning to recapture an unmediated, “authentic” emotional experience that had been lost in late Victorian culture. Through their appropriation of premodern, non-Anglo culture, the young cyclists of New Orleans were expressing their restlessness within Anglo Protestant culture and constructing an identity that allowed them to escape it.

Appendix

Figure 14. Cover of the Spokes Scrapbook.



Figure 15. A page from the scrapbook, showing the faces of club members pasted over found images for humorous effect.



Figure 17. A photograph circa 1890 showing members of the Louisiana Cycling Club assembled in front of their clubhouse.



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