

**THE CYCLING CITY:
BICYCLES AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF URBAN AMERICA**

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2011

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the
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dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines the rise and fall of urban cycling in the 1890s. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, bicycles invaded American cities. Millions of cyclists reveled in the utilitarian and recreational uses of the machine, pedaling to work, exercising their bodies, and escaping the chaos of the city. In the process, cyclists and a broad group of city reformers, politicians, and engineers redrew the blueprints of the American city. They imagined, and actually began to build, a city in which smooth asphalt stretched across the entire metropolis, specially designed bicycle paths and roads promoted and facilitated bicycle transportation, and traffic regulations accounted for the rising number of cyclists and the complications that they added to the urban network. Likewise, doctors dreamed of a cycling city defined by the improved health of its citizens; sanitarians of an environment devoid of horses, filth, and disease; women of a completely accessible city. Indeed, as a practically noiseless, non-polluting, health-inducing, liberating, and private vehicle, the bicycle offered the promise of a revitalized, healthful, clean, and moral urban environment. In short, it offered the chance to make the modern city more livable.

As the first private vehicle affordable to the masses, bicycles began to satisfy an established desire for a private transportation option as urban Americans celebrated mobility, independence, and flexibility. As cycling became democratized, a coalition of cyclists and their

allies coalesced into a powerful group that influenced the city-building process. To a startling degree, they succeeded in implementing “bicycle-friendly” planning techniques, incorporating bicycle paths, bicycle valets, and laws favorable to cyclists. At this moment in history, American cities were the leaders in accommodating urban cycling. Although cycling in European cities would persist far longer than in the United States, American cities had laid the path toward a future in which cycling would remain a critical component of the urban transportation network. Yet suddenly, by the turn-of-the-century, the popularity of cycling in the United States dropped dramatically. That Americans developed an unrivaled taste for automobiles and that city planners would follow suit was not a foregone conclusion.

In all, bicycles reshaped both the physical design of American cities and the lives of their inhabitants. Although its lifespan was brief, the bicycle was a transformative instrument.

Acknowledgements

First, I must thank my advisor, David Nasaw, who not only served as a model teacher, historian, and writer, but also as a generous advisor. He encouraged this project early on when I was not so sure. Likewise, Thomas Kessner has, throughout graduate school, pushed me to become a better historian and given me valuable feedback on this dissertation. I was lucky to have him, in addition to three other great readers, Gerald Markowitz, Owen Gutfreund, and Setha Low, on my dissertation committee. Their input has been immeasurable.

I also owe much to my fellow students and friends, Gwynneth Malin and Paul Naish, for regularly sharing their critiques (and pizza) with me. James Oakes, a professor who seemed incapable of being fooled, led a useful dissertation seminar. His comments and those from my fellow participants—Mariel Isaacson, Tommy Hafer, David Parsons, Carl Lindskoog, Thomas Harbison, Brendan O'Malley—provided some much needed guidance when this project was still in its first trimester. Brendan O'Malley in particular, the History Department's resident editor, deserves special thanks for reading over a near-final draft of my entire dissertation. As do two professors, Jonathan Sassi, who read a (very) rough version of some of the material that has been included here, and Mark Rose, who gave me a thoughtful review of one of my chapters and a heavy dose of encouragement.

Librarians, archivists, and fellow researchers ably assisted in finding sources and making sense of them. Specifically, the staff of the New-York Historical Society, the New York Public Library, the Historical Society of Washington, D.C., the Library of Congress, the National Museum of American History Library, the Washington D.C. Public Library, the Minneapolis City Archives, the Chicago History Museum, the Pennsylvania State Archives, the Municipal Archives in New York, the Chicago Public Library, the Newberry Library, the San Francisco

History Center, the San Francisco Municipal Library, the California Historical Society, the Bancroft Library, the Harvard University Archives, and the Schlesinger Library all warrant a sincere thank you. Thomas Cameron Burr offered some helpful suggestions and forwarded a few hard to find primary sources. Ross Petty and Bruce Epperson graciously sent me reprints of their articles. Captain Jack helped me think of a word (appropriately maritime-themed) that was frustratingly stuck on the tip of my tongue. And, Betty Einerman, the History Department's Assistant Program Officer, helped me in too many ways to count and always did so with good cheer.

I would be remiss not to mention the substantial funding that made graduate school and this dissertation possible. I am thankful to have won the Chancellor's Fellowship, a Doctoral Student Travel Grant, and the generous E.P. Thompson Fellowship. More personally, I would like to thank Ellen and Les Cohen for giving me unbridled support (and French toast) along the way. My parents, Mike and Rose, also deserve special recognition. Without them, for many reasons, this would never have been possible. And most of all, I would like to thank Amanda. As my wife/friend/editor/baker she made this project more than bearable. It was she who made this dissertation, and everything else, worthwhile.

For Amanda.

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Introduction

This dissertation is not about bicycles. It is about cities. To be more specific, it is about the American cycling city. It is about a place where ribbons of asphalt and miles of bicycle paths flowed in and around the metropolis. A place where cyclists wrote the traffic laws and supervised road construction. A place where politicians begged for the support of the army of “wheelmen.” A place where cafes buzzed with bicycle talk. A place where commuters, messengers, delivery boys, and police swarmed through the city on bicycles. A place where novelists wrote their fiction and poets their poems about bicycles. A place where restaurants and museums valeted their patrons’ wheels and parking garages overflowed with bicycles. A place where doctors, ministers, reformers, educators, and engineers preached the gospel of cycling. A place where stubborn social and cultural traditions were suddenly uprooted. It is about a particular place at a particular time in which bicycles, like never before or after, transformed our cities.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, a broad group of men and women embraced the bicycle as a fundamental feature of urban life and imagined, even began building, a cycling city. Indeed, the bicycle appeared to solve many of the urban ills that had come to define America’s cities. As urban populations soared and as industrialization cast its long shadow, the shortcomings of city life could not be hidden. Factories spewed fortunes and soot. Office jobs furnished a regular income, but a sedentary way of life. Mechanized transit brought speed, but also urban thunder. Reformers were undaunted. Professional engineers sought to provide fresh water and sanitized streets, crusaders fought to improve squalid living conditions, and city

builders redesigned the urban landscape to promote efficient transportation, incorporate places of salutary refuge, and manage the exponential population growth.

Bicycles offered a potential solution to all of these urban ills. The bicycle inspired thoughts of an improved city in which pollution was negligible, transport was noiseless and rapid, leisure spaces were democratized, and the divisions between city and country blurred. As a private and soon to be affordable vehicle, the bicycle enabled masses of city dwellers to redraw the urban grid. Cyclists could pedal to work, the park, or the adjacent countryside, leaving timetables, transit fares, and pedestrians in their wake. They moved at a clip faster than trotting horses, emitted no pollutants, and produced but a faint noise easily swallowed up by the cacophonous city. Unlike streetcars and other rival forms of transportation, bicycles offered the advantages of private transportation, ran twenty-four hours a day, required little infrastructure and none of the tracks that chewed up roads. On top of it all, the bicycle unleashed newfound feelings of independence, power, and emancipation. Used as often as a tool for exercise, recreation, and leisure as for transportation, bicycles served multiple functions and promised to solve countless problems.

Even so, the zealousness with which Gilded Age city dwellers celebrated the bicycle remains startling. Pundits heralded bicycles, and the cities they were in the midst of spawning, as decidedly revolutionary. “In its social importance the bicycle deserves to rank next to the railway and the telegraphs, among the inventions of our waning century” an admiring *Atlantic Monthly* journalist wrote in 1892.¹ Not to be outdone, a writer for *Munsey’s Magazine* several years later surmised that “Today, in reckoning the achievements of the nineteenth century, to such epoch making discoveries as the railroad, the steamship, the telegraph, and the telephone,

¹ Nathaniel Southgate Shaler, “The Betterment of our Highways,” *Atlantic Monthly*, October 1892, 506.

we can hardly refuse to add, as the latest item on the list, the bicycle.”² A noted physician asserted that “not in two hundred years has there been any one thing that has so benefited the race as the invention of the bicycle.”³ Another commentator observed that within the city “the bicycle levels all social distinction,” lowers the rent for working class men who could live farther from work, and “is an essential chapter in the emancipation of women.”⁴ “As a revolutionary force in the social world the bicycle has had no equal in modern times,” yet another pundit joined the seemingly infinite chorus.⁵ Hyperbole aside, late nineteenth-century urbanites looked upon the bicycle as an almost utopian instrument.

To Americans living in the 1890s, the possibilities of the bicycle and the cycling city appeared limitless. Whatever changes bicycles had already ushered in paled in comparison to the future shockwaves they would trigger. “The effect upon the development of cities will be nothing less than revolutionary. Not only will the advance of public convenience be invaluable, but the comfort and the health of the people will be promoted to a corresponding degree.” Horses would disappear, a journalist writing in 1892 continued, and “perfectly smooth pavements” would follow.⁶ A different soothsayer predicted that cycling would soon become the “universal method of locomotion,” and “We must, therefore, look upon the bicycle as a permanent factor, and upon its sociological and economic effects not as temporary disturbances but as the manifestations of a new order of things.”⁷

In retrospect, some of the rosy prognostications about the bicycle’s potential influence appear myopic at best. But the bicycle boom of the 1890s was one of those rare moments in

² “The World Awheel,” *Munsey’s Magazine*, May 1896, 131.

³ “The Bicycle Fever,” *Times* (Richmond), June 4, 1896.

⁴ “Contemporary Literature,” *The Sanitarian*, July 1895, 92-93.

⁵ “Bicycle Problems and Benefits,” *The Century Magazine*, July 1895, 474-475.

⁶ Sylvester Baxter, “Economic and Social Influences of the Bicycle,” *The Arena*, October 1892, 578-583.

⁷ Joseph B. Bishop, “Social and Economic Influence of the Bicycle,” *The Forum*, August 1896, 682.

history when a single, new piece of technology seemed to offer the chance for a complete reconceptualization of urban life. To be sure, while many of the paths leading toward that future American cycling city were laid, none, ultimately, were followed. Still, the story behind the sudden adoption, promotion, and integration of bicycles in the late nineteenth century city offers a unique glimpse into urban life. Throughout the 1890s, cyclists found ways to adapt to city traffic, laws, and spaces, while the city found ways to adapt to its most recent tenant.

Despite its prominent role in urban society, few scholars have chronicled, let alone focused on, the bicycle's transformative effects.⁸ Perhaps bicycles' second-class status on today's streets led to this scholarly lacuna. Just as automobiles dominate our streets, so too do they dominate the library stacks. Even the bulk of the existing bicycle-related literature is, at least indirectly, related to automobiles. These histories tend to emphasize the bicycle's role as a transitional mode of transportation that laid the groundwork for the ultimate accommodation of automobiles. While bicycles were indeed a crucial factor in the particular ways in which cities later dealt with automobiles, critical questions about the bicycle's impact on cities in its own time remain unanswered. Those who lived in the 1890s city knew almost nothing of the motorcar. How they understood their urban world and how they imagined the urban ideal is often misconstrued because of our own preconceptions about the looming inevitability of the automobile.

⁸ There are, of course, several historical studies about bicycles. None, however, duplicate what I hope to have done. Norman Dunham's dissertation from 1956 provides a terrific overview of the history of the bicycle in the United States, but his study focuses on the earliest eras and before my study begins. In the early 1970s, Robert Smith published a "social history" of the bicycle that is filled with remarkable anecdotes covering a broad array of themes, even if few are investigated fully. The study, however, lacks scholarly rigor, is plagued with dubious claims, and is heavy on narrative and light on analysis. Finally, and more recently, David V. Herlihy has produced a fine volume chronicling the entire history of the bicycle. That study, albeit quite useful for anyone interested in bicycle technology, devotes most of its pages to chronicling the evolution of the machine and less, although some, about the bicycle's impact on the development of cities. Norman L. Dunham, "The Bicycle Era in American History," (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1956); Robert A. Smith, *A Social History of the Bicycle, Its Early Life and Times in America* (New York: American Heritage Press, 1972); David V. Herlihy, *Bicycle: The History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

The remaining bicycle-related historiography is dominated by studies of technological innovation. Scores of scholars have, quite adeptly, explored the evolution of the bicycle as machine. Nary a nineteenth-century bicycle patent or ball bearing has escaped the meticulous eyes of a bicycle historian.⁹ My study, however, is not about the machine itself, but rather, about the interplay between a social and technological practice (cycling) and the urban form, a subject that has been too often deemphasized.

Back in 1896, one writer predicted that “When the social and economic history of the nineteenth century comes to be written, the historian cannot ignore the invention and development of the bicycle.”¹⁰ He and his contemporaries recognized the sweeping changes accompanied by the popularization of urban cycling and assumed, quite wrongly, that the bicycle’s place within the city and its place in history were secure. For certain, bicycles, and those who rode them, transformed late nineteenth-century urban America in significant and unique ways. While the telegraph and telephone conquered distance, the cinema blurred reality, and electric lights defeated darkness, bicycles re-formed urban design and city streets, enhanced mobility, democratized private transportation, fueled leisure and recreation, promoted good health, and shrank urban spaces as part of a larger urban transformation that altered the city and the lives of its inhabitants. As cities provided the stone, it was the cyclists who helped sculpt the modern city. As such, neither a history of the bicycle, nor a history of the city would be complete without the other.

⁹ See any of the proceedings of the annual International Cycling History Conference, for example, Rob van der Plas and Andrew Ritchie, eds., *Cycle History 12: Proceedings of the 12th International Cycling History Conference, San Remo/Pigna, Italy, 25-28 September 2001* (San Francisco: Cycle Pub., 2002).

¹⁰ Henry J. Garrigues, “Woman and the Bicycle,” *The Forum*, January 1896, 578.

This study seeks to examine the United States' long-forgotten bicycle age and the subsequent reorientation of American cities. Any historian attempting to write about an urban phenomenon inherently faces a methodological dilemma—whether to investigate a theme broadly across multiple sites or to instead focus microscopically on a single city. While each approach offers its bounties and disadvantages, for this project, my early research confirmed that within the country's largest cities the patterns of change, the tones of debate, and the cycling landscape developed fairly consistently. Nonetheless, important distinctions remained. Local geography, political climate, the built environment, cultural tastes, and social mores affected the ways in which cities and their inhabitants embraced bicycles.¹¹ Yet, in more ways than not, the cycling city was, indeed, a national phenomenon. Throngs of cyclists and a plethora of cycling-related infrastructure could be found in almost any American city of note in the 1890s. I have, therefore, worked with a broad canvas. Throughout this dissertation, I reference dozens of cities and the footnotes will lead hungry readers to newspaper articles and municipal reports from too many cities to count. But much of my primary research was, necessarily, more focused. Research trips to New York, Washington, D.C., Chicago, and San Francisco provided the foundation for much of my argument and, I hope, helped ensure regional balance. In many ways, these larger cities provided the model for how smaller cities came to accommodate cyclists and for how cyclists in these regions came to reshape their cities. Municipal records, manuscript collections, diaries, visual sources, and other primary documents from these cities and others also provided a necessary supplement to the overwhelming press coverage of all things bicycle in the 1890s. As much as any cyclist, newspaper and magazines had caught bicycle fever and sought to cash in on

¹¹ Throughout this dissertation I have tried to pay attention to these regional differences wherever possible. In some instances, however, certain themes played out so unevenly across American cities that they defied general characterization. For instance, the debate over Sunday cycling—the religious issue of whether cycling should be permitted on Sundays—reflected more about a city's religious ethos than anything to do with bicycles per se.

the nationwide phenomenon with news articles, editorials, and regular columns about anything related to cycling, many of which, written as much to sell newspapers as to report the news, contained exaggerated claims. Nonetheless, this study is far from exhaustive. In focusing on the physical development of cities, as well as the opportunities the bicycle offered urban residents, significant cycling-related issues receive but scant attention. Three of the themes most written-about among the tiny cohort of bicycle scholars—bicycle technology, bicycle manufacturing, and bicycle racing—are only minor characters.

With respect to periodization, the dawn, peak, and demise of the American cycling city follow within just years of one another on the historical timeline. By the late 1880s, enthusiasm for cycling accelerated and would continue to grow, at an exponential rate, until peaking in the middle to late 1890s, before its sudden decline. Although I consider some of the early origins and extended effects of the cycling city, most of this study falls within the final chapter of the nineteenth century.

Despite its brief life span, the cycling city offers a new medium by which to study an array of historical themes. In Chapter I, I begin by examining the origins of cycling in the United States, the evolution of its popularity, and the emergence of the cycling city. Some of the themes merely introduced here, but necessary to chart the creation of the cycling city, are elaborated upon in later chapters. Chapters II, III, and IV, are arranged thematically. In Chapter II, I consider the built environment and the ways in which, through the paving of streets, redrafting of traffic law, and laying of bicycle paths, cyclists reshaped the physical city. Chapter III incorporates issues of livability. Here, I illustrate how a diverse group of urban men and women came to view the bicycle as a salve for the perceived evils of urbanity. Bicycles, so their proponents and legions of cheerleaders argued, would make cities healthier, more modern, and,

at least conceptually, smaller—in essence more livable. In Chapter IV, I investigate some of the social and cultural transformations ushered in by the bicycle. Women and men; black and white; recent immigrants and the native-born; the rich and poor and everyone in between, all, to various extents and for various purposes, adopted the bicycle. Finally, in Chapter V, I investigate the sudden crash of the cycling city. At this critical juncture, as the new century approached, the United States diverged from the rest of the world. The bicycle boom had been a global phenomenon, but its unexpected death was not. The reasons for the American collapse and the divergence of bicycle use in American cities vis-à-vis the world is the central story of the final chapter and, perhaps, the entire dissertation.

Chapter 1

The Rise of the Cycling City

“It is safe to say that few articles ever used by man have created so great a revolution in social condition as the bicycle.”¹ This bold pronouncement came not from an editorialist, philosopher, or partisan promoter, but rather from the United States government. The official census for 1900 contained an exclusive “special report” on bicycles, which enumerated the economic scale of bicycle manufacturing, summarized the technological history of the machine, and waxed philosophic about the vehicle’s effect on humanity. The broad scope of the report was well warranted. After all, there had to be some explanation for the seismic changes that the census reported. In the late 1870s, the number of cyclists in the United States numbered in the dozens. By the end of the 1890s, there were millions. In 1890, according to the census that marked the first acknowledgement of a “bicycle industry,” twenty-seven American firms produced bicycles. In 1900 there were 312. The newly-robust cycling economy employed roughly 1,700 workers in 1890; by 1900 that number grew to 17,000. At the turn of the twentieth century, American factories produced well over one million bicycles per year.² These quantitative measurements merely confirmed what would have been obvious to almost anyone living in the 1890s: bicycles had invaded America’s cities.

Amidst manure, carriages, pedestrians, and rotting horse carcasses, bicycles wove through city traffic. Cycling clubs proliferated, wheeled paraders regularly lined the streets, and bicycle racing attracted throngs of spectators. Merchants filled newspapers with advertisements for bicycles and bicycle accessories. Readers sifted through scores of new magazines dedicated to

¹ Axel Josephsson, “Bicycles and Tricycles,” in U.S. Census Bureau, *Twelfth Census of the United States: Manufactures* [1900], vol. X, pt. IV (Washington, D.C., 1902), 329.

² Josephsson, “Bicycles and Tricycles,” 324-328.

cycling. The *New York Times*, like most other dailies, printed a regular column with tidbits from “among the wheelmen.” Mayors and governors courted the all-important “bicycle vote” as cyclists formed powerful political lobbies. Bicycle racks became commonplace outside of churches and schools. Municipalities, at the behest and inspection of cyclists, asphalted and macadamized their thoroughfares. Bicycle paths ran through and between cities. Urban parks, once a tranquil refuge for the well-to-do, contained whizzing bicycles and brought together a motley collection of city dwellers. Factory workers, government officials, teachers, and clerks rode to and from work. With a quickened pace, messenger boys transported news and documents, vendors carried milk and eggs, postmen delivered mail, and doctors and ministers made house calls. Lodged somewhere between the walking city and the age of the automobile, the cycling city had a character of its own.

That world—the cycling city—emerged almost as quickly as it would disappear.

Although the bicycle craze peaked near the close of the nineteenth century, earlier bicycle models had enjoyed a devoted, albeit small, following. In fact, for centuries, humans had been captivated by the notion of manpowered propulsion. In the seventeenth century, a French physician designed a four-wheeled carriage powered by a combination of planks, ropes, pulleys, and a pair of servant’s legs.³ But it was not until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that the first prototypes of the bicycle emerged across Europe. Inventors initially produced “horseless carriages” that mimicked the horse-driven variety in nearly every way except for the power source. In 1816, the German forester Baron von Drais, in search of a faster way to survey his vast domain, designed the *laufmaschine*, or “running machine,” which moved with force generated by the rider’s feet pushing directly against the ground. Made of wood and

³ David V. Herlihy, *Bicycle: The History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 15.

built with iron tires, the aptly dubbed “Draisine” merited a brief spurt of popularity in Europe and the United States. Before crossing the Atlantic, velocipedes, a more modern, pedal-powered, two-wheel vehicle, began attracting the attention of Parisian gentlemen by the mid-1860s.



Figures 1.1 and 1.2: Figure 1.1 (left) is an image of the 1817 Draisine and Figure 1.2 (right) is a sketch of *The American Velocipede*, by Theodore R. Davis and published in *Harper's Weekly*, December 19, 1868.

These machines quickly produced a mini-craze of their own within the United States. Rinks built for velocipede riding dotted American cities, but the effect on the urban environment was minimal and ephemeral. Throughout the 1870s, even as French and English riders continued to experiment with the latest bicycle incarnations, the clunky machines failed to attract a sizeable following in American cities.⁴ That the velocipede craze came and went so quickly rendered any future bicycle mania doubtful. Then, surprisingly, a new wave of enthusiasm for bicycles took hold in the wake of the one-hundred year anniversary (and celebration) of the United States declaring its independence.

⁴ Norman L. Dunham, “The Bicycle Era in American History” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1956), 7-8; Herlihy, *Bicycle*, 19, 75-76; Charles Eadward Pratt, *What & Why: Some Common Questions Answered* (Boston: Press of Rockwell and Churchill, 1884), 21. The terms “velocipede” and “bicycle” were often used to describe the same types of vehicle. For further clarification on the two terms, their meanings, and how nineteenth century riders used the two terms, see Herlihy, *Bicycle*, 23. Although Herlihy’s study provides the most recent and detailed history of the bicycle’s evolution, the actual moment when the “bicycle was born” and its true inventor still remain heavily debated.

Wandering through the Centennial Exhibition of 1876 in Philadelphia, a thirty-three year old Civil War veteran was, unsuspectingly, about to eye the machine that would forever change his life. Albert Augustus Pope, honorifically referred to as Colonel Pope, joined nearly nine million fellow visitors in perusing the more than 250 pavilions marking the nation's anniversary with displays of technological and cultural progress. The telephone, typewriter, and a seventy-foot tall Corliss steam engine were among the most talked about attractions. But it was the display of a high-wheel bicycle that infatuated the Colonel. Despite having no idea how to ride the "Pennyfarthing," as it was dubbed in England, the Colonel was smitten. He soon set sail for England to inspect the manufacturer's factory. After just a short stay the Colonel was convinced. The cycling industry in Europe, and particularly in Britain, was quickening. In Great Britain alone, 50,000 cyclists rode through the streets.⁵ Pope foresaw that Americans would soon become bicycle crazy; and as a result, he would stand to make millions of dollars. On both accounts, he was right.

Colonel Albert Pope, the grizzled veteran who wore more of his salt and pepper hair on his face than atop his head, became nineteenth century America's foremost bicycle tycoon. Although he had already had some success in manufacturing supplies and tools for shoemakers, the Bostonian dreamed of forging a bicycle empire. He began, like his few early competitors, by importing bicycles from England to test the market. Soon he developed his own manufacturing facility, turning out high-wheel bicycles. As one of the first, and certainly most aggressive domestic producers, Pope, who split time between his Boston home and Hartford factory, dominated the market and continued to sell the latest high-wheel bicycles under the "Columbia" brand and helped initiate a fad throughout the early 1880s. Featuring an oversized front wheel

⁵ Stephen Goddard, *Colonel Albert Pope and His American Dream Machines: The Life and Times of a Bicycle Tycoon Turned Automotive Pioneer* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, 2000), 67-73.

(at least twice the size of the back wheel, although oftentimes much bigger) and a seat that rested many feet above the ground, the high-wheeler, or “ordinary,” was capable of achieving tremendous speed. Indeed, as manufacturers quickly realized, the larger the front wheel, the farther one could travel with just one revolution of the pedals, which like earlier models were attached directly to the front wheel. The high-wheeler boasted a frame composed of light steel, instead of the heavy iron that had traditionally been used, dramatically reducing its weight.⁶

The form of the high-wheeler, however, continued to pose a series of problems. First, any dress-wearing woman daring enough to mount the saddle in the sky would have adopted a rather revealing pose. Few tried and even fewer became regular riders. Universally, the lack of stability and overall safety problems added significant danger. Because of the position of the seat, which rested above the disproportionately large front wheel, crashes often resulted in “headers,” in which the rider fell forward, head first, to the ground. The even bigger challenge involved mounting the bicycle. As the high-wheeler disciple Mark Twain explained:

You do it in this way: you hop along behind it on your right foot, resting the other on the mounting-peg, and grasping the tiller with your hands. At the word, you rise on the peg, stiffen your left leg, hang your other one around in the air in a general and indefinite way, lean your stomach against the rear of the saddle, and then fall off, maybe on one side, maybe on the other; but you fall off. You get up and do it again; and once more; and then several times.⁷

And that was after twelve hours of riding class.

Twain’s palatial, painted-brick, Victorian mansion sat just a half mile from the sprawling campus of Pope’s manufacturing center in Hartford. And so the curious author visited the

⁶ For more on the production of the high-wheelers and the evolution of bicycle manufacturing see, David A. Hounshell, *From the American System to Mass Production, 1800-1932: The Development of Manufacturing Technology in the United States* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 189-217; Bruce D. Epperson, *Peddling Bicycles to America: The Rise of an Industry* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2010).

⁷ Mark Twain, *The Complete Essays of Mark Twain* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2000), 553. For more recollections from high-wheel cyclists, including one amusing description of how a rider learned to ride (and scraped his knuckles) by wheeling between a narrow space in between two brick buildings see, Clipping File, “Sports, Cycling,” Chicago History Museum, Chicago, Illinois.

factory, paid a handsome sum for one of the new machines, enrolled in a cycling class and developed, as so many did, a love/hate relationship with his bicycle. (He once quipped “Get a bicycle. You will not regret it, if you live.”⁸) Despite Twain’s persistent instability atop the high-wheeler (a young onlooker once suggested that he “dress up in pillows”) he joined a thriving class of adventurous, affluent men who adopted the wheel.⁹ At a cost generally north of \$120 and oftentimes significantly more, the high-wheeler’s price limited its customer base and, since cycling was not yet “fashionable” in the way that it would ultimately become, these earliest cyclists represented but a small subset of the moneyed class. They tended to be young men of means, but not those who moved comfortably among the traditional elite. Their interest in cycling, in turn, attracted cunning businessmen and provided an occasion to lay the groundwork for cycling to move into the mainstream.

Yet, the urban environment was initially rather inhospitable to cyclists. In the waning years of the 1870s, major metropolises like Boston, Providence, and Brooklyn, closed their streets to bicycle traffic. Other cities lacked comprehensive bans on cycling, but often circumscribed the city, prohibiting bicycles from traveling in parks, on boulevards, or through certain neighborhoods.¹⁰ The hostility, although widespread, had multiple births. Relatively few owned bicycles and relatively few could realistically become cyclists. For the most part, women, the elderly, children, and the less-than-affluent found that the bicycles were either not designed for them, too difficult to ride, or too expensive. Others saw bicycles as a silly novelty, certainly not worthy of sharing space with legitimate vehicles. Pedestrians, attuned to the hooped alarms which warned of coming traffic, quickly judged the silent yet speedy bicycles a would-be hazard,

⁸ Goddard, *Colonel Albert Pope and His American Dream Machines*, 9-10; Twain, *The Complete Essays of Mark Twain*, 557.

⁹ Twain, *The Complete Essays of Mark Twain*, 555.

¹⁰ See, for example, the early ban on cycling in San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park. San Francisco Park and Recreation Commission Minutes, 1885, 51-53, San Francisco Public Library.

while carriage drivers and teamsters were less than happy to share the road with machines that allegedly made their horses skittish and which often moved at a faster clip than them.¹¹ Thus, the lone cyclist, who dared to challenge the restrictions, rode at the mercy of the police, the courts, and the often temperamental horse-driver.

In part to combat the anti-cycling ordinances, local cycling clubs emerged in the nation's leading cities. The members, who shared stories, drinks, and weekend rides joined as much for the camaraderie as for any hopes of wielding political power. The earliest such organization, the Boston Bicycle Club, formed in 1878. Within several years, most major American cities could claim several cycling clubs. Although the composition and mission of cycling clubs varied, most served as a social nexus for young, well-to-do, white males.¹² Weekly or monthly "club runs" (pre-planned rides) along with social events dominated the clubs' agendas. At a typical event, like the March 7, 1881 dinner that the Harvard University Bicycle Club hosted, members sang songs, talked bicycles, and dined on an eight-course meal featuring Larded Grouse, Black Duck, and Walnut Pudding.¹³ Still, in their nascent stages, when the most prominent clubs boasted only hundreds of members, they exerted significant political influence. Realizing that the organizations might serve at the center of a grass roots pro-cycling campaign, individual bicycle manufacturers subsidized the largest clubs. When the Massachusetts Bicycle Club sought to erect its headquarters in Boston, it was Colonel Pope who helped pay for its construction. With Pope's dollars and input, the concrete ramp inviting club members to wheel through the front door opened for traffic in 1885.

¹¹ See, for example, a debate about a proposed ordinance to legalize cycling in the streets. "The Aldermen," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 27, 1880.

¹² For example, at least one early club consisted of only black riders. Like many private associations, bicycle clubs often formed around shared class, ethnic, or racial identities. "Colored Wheelmen's Clubs," for example, served black riders who often found themselves prohibited from joining other clubs, including the League of American Wheelmen. "Bicycle Races this Evening," *Omaha Daily Bee*, July 19, 1895. This subject will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

¹³ Records of the Harvard Bicycle Club, 1879-1889, Harvard University Archives.

As club membership swelled, savvy riders recognized the potential for collective action. Beginning in 1880, on the shores of Newport, Rhode Island, representatives from thirty-one separate bicycle clubs united to form the League of American Wheelmen. The L.A.W., a fitting acronym, proved a worthy counterpart to the forces behind the cycling prohibitions as it fulfilled its mission to “ascertain, defend and protect the rights of wheelmen.”¹⁴ It would ultimately develop into the most powerful voice for American cyclists, but at first it faced an unwelcoming public and unfavorable municipal law. And so, with the freedom of city space at stake, cyclists from the L.A.W., local bicycle clubs, and even some unaffiliated riders, began their crusade.

With mixed success throughout the 1880s, riders challenged city ordinances which restricted their access to city streets and parks. In San Francisco, Hartford, Newport, Brooklyn, and elsewhere, anti-cycling ordinances had stemmed from the notion that bicycles (or velocipedes, as many of these restrictions remained from an earlier era) were not, principally, vehicles. In each of these cities, riders successfully overturned the bans. In San Francisco, it was the Bay City Wheelmen who were chiefly responsible for overturning a municipal law that had prohibited bicycles from the streets. Likewise, Philadelphia cyclists, once barred from Fairmount Park, eventually gained admission. Chicago’s parks had also denied the then relatively small cluster of riders who clamored for access. Almost exclusively, early cyclists lived within large cities, in part, because of the relative number of paved roads (as compared to the countryside). Although the major municipal asphaltting projects were years away and although the hodgepodge of cobblestones, wood, cement blocks, and other paving materials frustrated urban cyclists, paved roads, albeit poorly paved, existed almost exclusively within urban areas. But above all, it was the urban parks that boasted the most passable and scenic

¹⁴ “The L.A.W. and Legal Rights,” *Outing*, January 1886, 454; Phillip P. Mason, “The League of American Wheelmen and the Good Roads Movement: 1880-1905,” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1957), 37; Dunham, “The Bicycle Era in American History,” 196-197.

roadways. To a certain degree, cycling's popularity depended on the ability of cyclists to attain the legal rights to ride through the city and its parks. Getting this key to the city was no easy task.¹⁵

No battle was more important in the war between organized cyclists and city officials than that which concerned New York's finest prize: Central Park. In 1880, responding to a petition from some angry park patrons, the Commissioners of Central Park unanimously outlawed bicycles from enjoying the 843-acre oasis of rolling hills, smooth paths, shaded knolls, and imported vegetation. The purported rationale for the prohibition was simple: bicycles frightened horses. The ensuing fight over the ban raised significant questions, not only about bicycles in the Park, but also about the bicycle's place within the city.¹⁶

On July 2, 1881, three cycling enthusiasts, all of whom had affiliations with local cycling clubs, purposefully violated the anti-bicycle ordinance to test the constitutionality of the Central Park Commissioners' ban. One man rode solo atop a bicycle and the other two mounted tricycles, a premeditated decision which would allow the agitators to test the ban against both bicycles and tricycles, the latter of which (often used by women) might have been more easily characterized as "pleasure carriages," along the lines of horse-drawn carriages. The police, tipped off by the violators themselves, arrested the three men. Per the anti-cycling ordinance, the officers solicited the five dollar fine, but the agitators resisted. Saved from prison by their lawyers, the three men were placed on parole and a flurry of widely watched legal battles ensued.¹⁷

¹⁵ Dunham, "The Bicycle Era in American History," 272; Pratt, *What & Why*, 44-48.

¹⁶ "Dunham, "The Bicycle Era in American History," 272; "Park Department Matters," *New York Times*, July 8, 1880.

¹⁷ Dunham, "The Bicycle Era in American History," 280-281; "The Bicyclists Defeated," *New York Times*, July 19, 1882; "Bicycles and Tricycles," *New York Times*, April 1, 1882; "A Test Bicycle Case," *New York Times*, July 15, 1881; "The Rights of the Bicycle," *New York Times*, July 26, 1881; "News for the Wheelman," *New York Times*, July 1, 1897.

Bicycle manufacturers and bicycle clubs rallied behind the three cyclists in hopes of using their case as a means to challenge the validity of anti-cycling ordinances in other cities. With legal precedent held in the balance, the burgeoning L.A.W. joined forces with Colonel Pope. A savvy entrepreneur, Pope emerged as a powerful champion of cyclists' rights. With the public support of the L.A.W. and a reported eight thousand dollars from the Pope Manufacturing Company, the campaign for unfettered access to the city mobilized around the Central Park Case.¹⁸

In the courtroom, the Park Commissioners continued to defend the ban on cycling as a mechanism to protect horses and their owners. As such, the defense attorneys led witness after witness into the courtroom, each one recounting an instance in which his horses became "crazy at the sight of a bicycle." The cycling advocates' attorney could do little more than mock the absurdity of the prosecution's central argument. After documenting that most horses can, in fact, ride safely alongside bicycles, the Defense Counselor satirized the Park Commissioners' attitude toward the cyclists in a crayon drawing that featured a calm cyclist wheeling through the park surrounded by "horses standing on their heads, others running away, men and women knocked down, and children run over." The finer details of the drawing revealed that the cyclist "carried a knife and revolver" and was "determined to kill all he could not run over." The sarcastic approach failed. The cyclists lost their case and, after several appeals, cycling remained a prohibited park activity in the city's most prized property.¹⁹

In the spring of 1883, New York cyclists launched a reinvigorated campaign for equal access to Central Park. This time their tactics focused on demonstrating the bicycle's

¹⁸ Goddard, *Colonel Albert Pope and His American Dream Machines*, 73; Dunham, "The Bicycle Era in American History," 281.

¹⁹ "The Rights of the Bicycle," *New York Times*, July 26, 1881; "The Bicyclists Defeated," *New York Times*, July 19, 1882; "Bicycles and Tricycles," *New York Times*, April 1, 1882; "A Test Bicycle Case," *New York Times*, July 15, 1881.

innocuousness. A group of wheelmen presented the Park Commissioners with a petition requesting the use of Central Park and Riverside Drive (which, like many desirable thoroughfares, also remained unavailable for cycling) for a massive cycling parade. The Commissioners approved the parade route, which the cyclists carefully laid out and which, not incidentally, called for the paraders to wheel directly past the residence of Egbert Viele, none other than a Commissioner of Central Park. The publicity for the L.A.W.-sponsored parade included this noteworthy detail, likely to ensure that the hundreds of cyclists cruising by Commissioner Viele's home would display proper decorum. In the end, the 1883 Central Park parade served not only to galvanize the spirit of the city's cyclists, but more importantly, to alter public opinion.²⁰

Newspapers estimated that anywhere between 750 and 2,000 cyclists participated in the League of American Wheelmen's fourth annual "meet" in May of 1883. The morning session was dedicated to club business; in the afternoon, the pack of cyclists took to the streets for the grand parade. The members, who hailed from more than six states, lined Fifth Avenue and began their exhibition, past Commissioner Viele's property and ultimately through Central Park. About 10,000 New Yorkers stood out in the sun while packs of riders stormed by. The festivities culminated in a banquet later that same night. Hundreds of L.A.W. members, an ex-mayor, local clergymen, the Commissioner of Public Works and, most notably, several Central Park Commissioners filled the great hall inside the Metropolitan Hotel. The six-story, brownstone-fronted, swanky hotel contained rooms for up to 1,000 guests, some 250 servants, and opulence that attracted fat wallets and the dapperly dressed to its lower Broadway location.²¹ Following

²⁰ "Wheel News," *Outing*, June 1883, 238; "Speeches Made at the Banquet of the League of American Wheelmen, Monday, May 28, 1883, At Metropolitan Hotel, New York City. (Continued.)," *Outing*, August 1883, 373-374.

²¹ "New-York Daguerreotyped," *Putnam's Monthly*, April 1853, 364; "A New-York Hotel," *New York Times*, June 19, 1852.

some opening toasts and a procession of jocular speakers, the organizers asked several of the prominent guests to offer their thoughts on the festivities of the day and on the bicycle in general. Commissioner Viele, a Mexican-American War veteran and a future one-term congressman who sported a weighty moustache that superbly demonstrated the forces of gravity, stood in the oversized, sun-lit room decked with rose-wood furniture of all sizes and types, and addressed the boisterous crowd. Impressed by the massive exhibition, Viele declared that “if there ever was a manly exercise, a manly enjoyment, it is...the steel horse.” He continued by predicting that the peaceful parade (the Commissioner cited “hearing no reports of skittish horses”) “would be the signal for a thorough acceptance of the bicycle as an ordinary vehicle of locomotion.”²² The support of at least one Park Commissioner was secure.

The banquet lasted well into the night, as most of the speakers ignored the suggested five-minute time limit. The League of American Wheelmen members gleefully recounted the marvelous parade and anticipated that their demonstration would open the gates of Central Park and all of the roads of the city to cyclists. After all, the strategy had worked before. In 1881, the Wheelmen held a parade in Boston and the following year a similar exhibition in Chicago, both of which, like the meet held in New York, sought to demonstrate the bicycle’s ability to co-exist with other urban inhabitants, including horses. In both cases, city officials lifted certain anti-cycling restrictions.²³

The effects of the New York parade were similarly immediate but more limited. Within weeks of the meet, the Park Commissioners redefined the rules of the park to accommodate some

²² “Speeches Made at the Banquet of the League of American Wheelmen, Monday, May 28, 1883, at Metropolitan Hotel, New York City,” *Outing*, July 1883, 309; “Speeches Made at the Banquet of the League of American Wheelmen, Monday, May 28, 1883, At Metropolitan Hotel, New York City. (Continued.)” *Outing*, August 1883, 373-374; “Wheelmen on Parade,” *New York Times*, May 29, 1883; “Parade of the Wheelmen,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 28, 1883.

²³ “Speeches Made at the Banquet of the League of American Wheelmen, Monday, May 28, 1883, at Metropolitan Hotel, New York City,” *Outing*, July 1883, 309.

cycling, but fell short of allowing full access. The Commissioners decided to allow “efficient riders” (defined as members of the organized cycling clubs) to use the West Drive of the park from sunrise to 9:00 a.m. Cycling enthusiasts welcomed the concessions (the Citizens Bicycle Club of the City of New York even decided to name Commissioner Egbert Viele as its first and only honorary member),²⁴ but the limitations were severe. Since only those cyclists belonging to official organizations, chiefly the L.A.W., gained access to the park, casual riders remained barred. It had been only days before the Central Park Commissioners granted the L.A.W. exclusive, albeit selective, admission to the park, that some of those same Commissioners dined alongside club members at the annual banquet. Perhaps the wheelmen had convinced the commissioners that club cyclists differed from the less sophisticated variety that sped by horses and crashed into pedestrians.

To be sure, the Park Commissioners’ persistent regulations revealed their desires to keep Central Park an attractive destination for the city’s elite. Even though the law-testers and high-wheel riders in general represented a segment of the elite, their taste for bicycles and adventure often put them at odds with the social mores of Victorian culture. Often bachelors, many of these earliest riders indulged in a sporting male culture that lived most comfortably in urban pool halls and saloons, a world that not everyone welcomed.²⁵ Thus, the ultimate accommodation of cyclists was crafted within the confines of a strict set of rules governing appearance and behavior. While many of the city’s wealthy horse-owning populace may have objected to *any* bicycle use in the park, New York’s most prominent citizens probably gave begrudging approval to the clause that restricted park use to club members and required that even those cyclists wear an

²⁴ Articles of incorporation and By-laws of the Citizens Bicycle Club of the City of New York: Organized June 1st, 1882; Incorporated, August 30th, 1883, New-York Historical Society, New York.

²⁵ For more on the urban “bachelor subculture” see, Howard P. Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor: Creating an American Subculture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

appropriate uniform.²⁶ In neighboring Brooklyn, Prospect Park Commissioners applied equally selective admission requirements. After adopting a set of rules regulating bicycle use in the park that had been “approved by the most experienced riders” and “suggested by the organized clubs of this city, with the view to avoid all possible opposition from the public,” only approved riders, donning a numbered badge could access Olmsted & Vaux’s other famed creation.²⁷

When city officials, still fearful about putting pedestrians and horse-drivers in peril, refused to budge on loosening any comprehensive anti-cycling ordinances, cyclists looked to the state government. In the spring of 1887, Governor David Hill of New York considered a new bill that would afford bicycles the same privileges as any pleasure carriage on all highways and parks in the state of New York. The principal opponent to the measure was Central Park Commissioner Crimmins who, at a hearing on the bill, apparently submitted “several yards of petitions” from some 7,000 carriage-owning New Yorkers who opposed the law. But more than the details of the bicycle bill, the Park Commissioners expressed concern over retaining their own authority. After all, the Commissioners had crafted their own ordinance regulating bicycle use in the parks, an ordinance that was now in jeopardy. The bicycle bill threatened to establish a precedent permitting the state legislature to shape the contours of city space, and thus the Park Commissioners rallied to preserve their power.²⁸

With all of New York’s parks and streets at stake, the cycling lobby united in support of the bill. The two mainstays of the lobby, the L.A.W. and the bicycle manufacturers, once again captained the effort. At the same hearing that Commissioner Crimmins decried the bill, Isaac Potter, an executive member of the L.A.W., and Charles Pratt, a cycling enthusiast and an

²⁶ “Concessions to Bicycle Riders,” *New York Times*, Jun 17, 1883.

²⁷ *Twenty-Fifth Annual Report of the Brooklyn Park Commissioners for the year 1885* (Brooklyn, 1886), 40-41.

²⁸ “Rights for the Bicyclers,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, June 15, 1887; “Heard by the Governor,” *New York Times*, June 15, 1887.

attorney for Colonel Pope, joined nearly a hundred cyclists in Albany to champion the bill.

Without a dissenting vote in the Assembly, and but two in the Senate, Governor Hill endorsed the bicycle bill (referred to as the “Liberty Bill” among cyclists) and, in effect, recognized the bicycle as a legitimate vehicle and granted cyclists all of the same rights as the buggy-driver.²⁹

The passage of the “Liberty Bill” established the bicycle lobby as a powerful political force. A cycling advocate wrote the bill, local cyclists lobbied their representatives, and scores rode their bicycles to Albany for the official hearing. As local papers reported in 1887, anyone seeking public office had to consider the “bicycle vote.” “The fraternity of wheelmen is said to control 20,000 votes here,” the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* added. Thus, the reporter continued, it was no surprise that the Governor “considered it discreet to sign” the “Liberty Bill.”³⁰ Bicycles had become numerous enough and their supporters vocal enough that the old notion of simply banning bicycle use was no longer viable. The question was no longer *if* bicycles could ride in the city, but rather *how* bicycles would ride in the city; and, accordingly, how the bicycle and the city would shape each another.

By the close of the 1880s, the state of American cycling had come a long way since Colonel Pope first saw the high-wheeler in 1876. The pack of cyclists roaming through and between cities that had once constituted only scores of riders now numbered in the many thousands. The number of clubs devoted to the sport and magazines promoting it mushroomed. Manufacturers reinvested their profits in mass advertising and promotion. Gradually, city parks and streets

²⁹ 1887 *New York Laws* Chapter 702; “Heard by the Governor,” *New York Times*, June 15, 1887; “Editor’s Open Window,” *Outing*, August, 1887, 484.

³⁰ “The Talk of New York,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, July 10, 1887.

entered the cyclists' domain. Nonetheless, after a decade or so of popularity, the high-wheeler failed. Safety concerns, cost, the lack of female ridership, and the high seat (which was so difficult to learn how to mount) capped the machine's potential and led to its ultimate demise.³¹ But the high-wheeler pioneers laid much of the groundwork for the widespread adoption of bicycles as a means of transportation and as a force in the shaping of cities. Because of their efforts, as one such rider recalled, prejudice against the bicycle "has subsided, opposition been quelled, restrictions removed" and just as importantly "it has been proved a vehicle for men, an instrument of dignity and genuine value, and not a mere plaything of boys."³² Thus, by the late 1880s, when cycling technology experienced a breakthrough, the seeds of the bicycle craze had already been sown.

The introduction of a safer and more comfortable bicycle greatly expanded the pool of cyclists. By the late 1880s, and more so in the opening years of the 1890s, the "safety" bicycle, a low-mounted version with a chain drive, two equal-sized wheels, and, ultimately, pneumatic tires, began to replace the high-wheeler. The pneumatic tires represented a significant advance because they allowed for greater speeds, reduced vibrations, and, in due course, a detachable and easily replaceable tire. The air-filled tires anchored a frame that was easy to maneuver and rolled beneath a lowered seat that attracted many who could never have mastered the art of (or those too frightened to have even attempted) mounting the high-wheelers. The new version, which has changed remarkably little since its introduction, attracted a new following. In 1891 alone, Americans purchased around 150,000 bicycles, nearly doubling the existing number.³³ The rapid increase in bicycle ownership also reflected a new base of potential riders. The name,

³¹ For more on the death of the high-wheeler and the evolution of the machine see Wiebe E. Bijker, *Of Bicycles, Bakelites, and Bulbs* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 19-100.

³² Pratt, *What & Why*, 40.

³³ Herlihy, *Bicycle*, 251.

“safety bicycle,” was, after all, derived from manufacturers hoping to attract a different set of customers than the adventurous men who dominated the high-wheel market. The reduction in average weight of the bicycle, which dropped from 42 pounds in 1890 to 22 pounds in 1895 also made cycling more manageable for more people.³⁴

The ridership for the high-wheelers and other early models was largely male and wealthy. As the new bicycles increased in popularity, production increased and prices dropped. The low-mounted bicycles, easier to ride and more affordable than the high-wheel variety, began to attract masses of middle-class men and women. To be sure, the average cost of a quality bicycle, which dropped to just below \$100 by the early 1890s (equal to more than \$2,000 today³⁵), was still relatively prohibitive for the average American; but in cities across the country, doctors, lawyers, teachers, shopkeepers, ministers, and other professionals readily adopted the bicycle.³⁶

³⁴ Martha Moore Trescott, “The Bicycle, a Technical Precursor to the Automobile,” *Business and Economic History* 5 (1976): 55.

³⁵ Using the Consumer Price Index, \$100 in 1893 would equal \$2,469.07 in 2008.

<http://www.measuringworth.com/calculators/uscompare/result.php> (accessed August 14, 2009). Alternatively, using the average unskilled wage as the measure of comparison, the price in 2008 would equal more than \$12,000.

³⁶ For more on the change of bicycle production from the high-wheel era to that of the safety, see, David A. Hounshell, *From the American System to Mass Production*. For more on the kind of small-scale manufacturing that defined the early bicycle industry see, Phillip Scranton, *Endless Novelty: Specialty Production and American Industrialization, 1865-1925* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).



Figures 1.3 and 1.4: These two machines, built about a decade apart, illustrate the rapid innovations in bicycle technology and form. On the left, is a high-wheel bicycle produced by Overman Victory and dates from about 1886, while the image on the right is that of a safety bicycle, more specifically, an 1896 Model 41 Columbia, which includes a “drop frame” for women allowing space for a skirt to hang down. Sources: “America on the Move,” National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Negatives 811-B and 41-230.

As cycling grew, so did bicycle production. With more and more manufacturers entering the market (almost three hundred new firms began producing bicycles in the 1890s) prices declined even more. The vast majority of these new consumers lived within major metropolises, both because of cities’ relatively wealthy populations and because of the simple fact that urban areas generally contained more miles of smooth surfaces. Throughout the 1890s these urban consumers could choose, according to their price range, from dozens of models offered by Columbia, Victor, Gladiator, Crescent, Spalding, Rambler, and scores of other brand name manufacturers, or from lower priced machines retailed by department stores, specialty shops, and mail-order catalogs. By the turn of the century, a new, high-end brand name bicycle like one of Pope’s Columbia bicycles could be purchased for \$50 (about the equivalent of \$1,300 today)

while lower quality machines, like those sold through the Sears, Roebuck & Co. catalog, priced for around \$10 (about the equivalent of \$260 today).³⁷

\$19.75 FOR OUR ACME JEWEL 1898 Model GUARANTEED BICYCLE.

For \$19.75 Cash in Full with Order or \$20.50 on our regular C. O. D. terms, as fully explained in front of book, we furnish a bicycle EQUAL TO ANY WHEEL you can buy in your local market at \$40.00. AT \$40.00 EVERYWHERE

ON NEXT PAGES YOU WILL FIND FULL DESCRIPTION, FULL PARTICULARS.

You will find this same bicycle offered by regular selling agents, the identical same wheel, you will recognize it when you see it, and everybody will say, You Must have Paid \$40.00 or \$50.00 for it.

The illustration shows a front view of our ACME JEWEL \$19.75 Bicycle, and you must see it to appreciate it. All the appearance of the finest wheels on the market and guaranteed for quality.

YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO BUY A CHEAPER WHEEL. This is positively the **FIRST TIME** a really good, honest, perfect, guaranteed, up-to-date Bicycle was ever offered for **SO LITTLE MONEY.**

Only \$19.75

SEE ILLUSTRATION ON PRECEDING PAGE, DESCRIPTION ON FOLLOWING PAGES.

Figure 1.5: Above is an advertisement from the Sears, Roebuck & Co.'s 1898 catalogue. Over the next several years, prices continued to decline. Source: Sears, Roebuck & Co., *Models of 1898*, 9.

Following the spike in ridership, a second-hand market for bicycles developed, enabling even less affluent urbanites to join the ranks of urban cyclists.³⁸ Classified advertisements in

³⁷ Pope Manufacturing Company, *Columbia Bicycle Catalog for 1900*; Robert L. Steiner, "Learning from the Past – Brand Advertising and the Great Bicycle Craze of the 1890s" in *Proceedings of the Annual Conference of the American Academy of Advertising: Advances in Advertising Research and Marketing* (Knoxville, The Academy, 1978), 38; <http://www.measuringworth.com/calculators/uscompare/result.php> (accessed August 14, 2009). These comparisons were made based on CPI data, but if they were compared using the average unskilled wages the prices would be much higher in terms of today's dollars.

local papers announced used bicycles for sale and potential trades. Desperate for bicycles, city dwellers offered up books, musical instruments, furniture, and even their household pets in exchange for bicycles.³⁹ On a larger scale, bicycle manufacturers openly marketed their used bicycles (often alongside newer models) in their annual catalogs and advertisements. One such bicycle producer remarked back in 1889, just as bicycle sales began their vertical climb, that “the trade in second-hand goods has attained such proportions that...special attention is given to this trade, and we buy for cash, take in exchange, or place on sale such machines as our customers have to offer. We have constantly in hand a large stock of second-hand goods from which any rider may select something to suit his fancy or pocket-book.” Indeed, customers flipping through the forty-nine page catalog could find more than a hundred different bicycles, ranging from near \$30 to around \$100, depending on the model and “season” of the bicycle.⁴⁰ Others provided installment plans for those without the requisite cash on hand. A.G. Spalding & Bros., for example, offered its machines for only a down payment of one quarter of the total price with the remaining payments spread out over six monthly installments.⁴¹ On the local level, dealers in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, reported that their customers bought most of their machines on an

³⁸ Within the coterie of scholars concerned with bicycle use in the late nineteenth century, the question of whether a second-hand market for bicycles enabled a true democratization of the machine remains a favorite source of contention. Yet, my research indicates that there was indeed a robust second-hand bicycle market.

³⁹ “The World and the Wheel,” (Watertown) *Times in Boston Transcript*, June 13, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, May 26, 1896-February 11, 1897, and undated, New-York Historical Society, New York; Robert A. Smith, *A Social History of the Bicycle: Its Early Life and Times in America* (New York: American Heritage Press, 1972), 29. At least one opponent of women cyclists cited a particular advertisement offering to exchange a “child’s white crib” for a “lady’s bicycle,” as evidence that some mothers were more interested in joining the “charmed circle of cyclers” than being a good mother. Joseph B. Bishop, “Social and Economic Influence of the Bicycle,” *Forum*, August 1896, 688.

⁴⁰ W.W. Stall, *Bicycles, Tricycles, & Amateur Photographic Goods, Season of 1889* (Boston, 1889).

⁴¹ A.G. Spalding & Bros., *1890 Cycling and Photographic Catalogue* (New York, 2nd edition 1890), New-York Historical Society, New York.

installment plan, while a shop in St. Louis offered its customers payment plans as low as \$1.25 per week.⁴²

Records from individual cyclists show that it was far from uncommon for riders to “trade-in” an older vehicle for a newer model. One diary from an urban cyclist in the 1890s is particularly revealing. Shortly after Christmas in 1893, the then eighteen year-old Arthur Hyde decided to spend some of the money his grandfather had given him for the holiday to purchase a diary. Over the next four years, Hyde kept a bicycling diary in which he documented the rides, distances, and the bicycle parades in which he took part; his cycling accidents and would-be collisions; the make and model of his bicycles; and even his affection for a woman named “Helen” (a carnation she gave him in 1896 still sits dried and pressed between the pages of his diary). Judging from his notes, Hyde cycled mostly for recreation, touring neighboring towns and cities, but also to run errands and occasionally to work. At first, Hyde, like many others, simply “hired” a wheel, renting a bicycle when the occasion merited it. But in 1893 Hyde “enjoyed the privilege,” as he put it, of purchasing his first machine. In that year, he paid \$40 for a “Referee cushion tired wheel,” the first of what would be many bicycle purchases. The very next spring he traded in his old ride for a new bicycle with only “\$20 to boot.” In 1895, when Hyde became smitten by the “Bohemian” at Spalding’s (he eventually paid \$60 for it) he decided to sell his current bicycle, which netted him nearly \$45. The following year, Hyde returned to Spalding’s and traded his “Bohemian,” along with “\$30 to boot,” for the latest Spalding Model D road racer,” which he would sell in the near future.⁴³ Hyde’s diary illustrates that for at least a segment of urban consumers, eager to have the latest model, buying and selling used bicycles

⁴² “What a Bicycle Costs,” *Harrisburg Independent*, June 20, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York; “Information for Cyclists,” *New York Evening Sun*, July 4, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

⁴³ Arthur P.S. Hyde Bicycling Diary, 1892-1896, New-York Historical Society, New York.

was common. Hyde, like so many Americans at the time, was enraptured by what historian William Leach described as the “cult of the new.”⁴⁴ An expanding second-hand market, sharply declining prices, and the ability to pay via installments brought bicycles well within the reach of many city dwellers. As a columnist in 1896 put it, “It is literally true that the burden of proof is on every man, woman and child to show what physical or financial disability prevents him or her from owning and using a bicycle.”⁴⁵

To attract the new riders, bicycle producers marketed their products through promotional campaigns, the size and scope of which was unrivaled. In the embryonic stage of domestic bicycle manufacturing Pope and his rivals advertised relentlessly, knowing full well that no serious demand existed. Instead, the Colonel was determined to, as he put it, “create a demand.”⁴⁶ And that he did. In 1880, Pope spent \$60,000 to launch the *Wheelman* magazine.⁴⁷ His rival, Frank Weston, one of the other few early captains of the nascent bicycle industry, started the *American Bicycling Journal*. Aside from the preponderance of advertisements for Pope’s Columbia bicycles in *Wheelman* and Weston’s Cunningham, Heath, and Company machines in *American Bicycling Journal*, the two magazines appeared to readers as unbiased cycling periodicals promoting the sport. Pope also had his attorney and confidant write the *American Bicycler*, essentially a book-length treatise on the history and merits of “the wheel.”⁴⁸

⁴⁴ William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 3-5.

⁴⁵ Charles Lanier, “The World’s Sporting Impulse,” *Review of Reviews*, July 1896, 58.

⁴⁶ *Bicycling World*, May 15, 1880, 222 as quoted in Thomas Cameron Burr, “Markets as Producers and Consumers: The French and U.S. National Bicycle Markets, 1875-1910” (PhD diss., University of California, Davis, 2005), 83

⁴⁷ Glen Norcliffe, “Popeism and Fordism: Examining the Roosts of Mass Production,” *Regional Studies* 31, no.3 (1997): 269. A year later the *Wheelman* was merged with *Outing*.

⁴⁸ Charles Eadward Pratt, *The American Bicycler: A Manual for the Observer, the Learner, and the Expert* (Boston: Houghton Osgood and Co., 1879).

The bicycle magazines that Pope and Weston started evolved into merely two out of the whopping fifty bicycle periodicals in circulation by 1896.⁴⁹ In the late nineteenth century, an era of increasing literacy and cheaper printing costs, a new wave of magazines and journals flooded American culture, many of which, epitomized by those focused on cycling, catered to niche audiences. These cycling magazines offered subscribers a range of articles, from pieces on how to maintain a bicycle, maps outlining favored cycling routes, results of track races, news from prominent cycling clubs, and even bicycle-related humor. The newspapers also recognized the growing bicycle fever. Daily papers in large cities printed articles about cycling on a daily basis, often several per day. Desperate to attract the growing population of riders, newspapers created entire news departments devoted to “the wheel,” sponsored bicycle parades, and filled their pages with bicycle advertisements. The *New York Recorder* touted its loyalty to cyclists by boasting of its twenty-two columns of bicycle advertisements and exhaustive coverage of all things bicycle, while the *Chicago Times Herald* proudly advertised that it devoted more of its pages to cycling than any of its competitors.⁵⁰ The *Boston Post* devoted a special column in each Sunday paper to issues concerning women cyclists.⁵¹ Even for an enthusiast, it was impossible to keep up with all the bicycle-related news. One fan collected clippings from bicycle related articles printed around the country. In a six-month period from May until October of 1896, her collection spanned more than 2,500 pages in what now covers fourteen gigantic bound volumes.⁵²

⁴⁹ *American Wheelman*, August 27, 1896, 18

⁵⁰ “Cycle News,” *New York Recorder*, July 20, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York; *Chicago Bicycle Directory: A Reference Book of the Trade, 1898* (Chicago: Carr & Mensch, 1898), 39.

⁵¹ “For Women Cyclers,” *Boston Post*, June 14, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

⁵² Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

While Pope, Weston, and other producers rejoiced in the increasing press coverage, they maintained their own direct-to-consumer marketing efforts. “Modern technologies,” advertising proponents ultimately came to realize, “needed their heralds.”⁵³ Before the advent of full-scale advertising firms and professional ad-men in the 1920s, bicycle manufacturers were one of only a handful of industries that fully exploited the explosive growth of print media and impressionable consumers.⁵⁴ Bicycle advertisements were placed in popular national magazines, such as *Harper’s Weekly*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and *Scribner’s*. These advertisements, foreshadowing a trend in the industry, sold the idea of bicycle riding as much as the bicycle itself.⁵⁵ Especially since cycling was still so novel an activity, manufacturers had to convince consumers to become bicycle riders first and Columbia, Victor, or some other brand’s loyal customers second.

As sales grew so did advertising budgets. By the late 1890s, the bicycle industry, which accounted for about 10 percent of all magazines’ net advertising revenue, probably spent more on advertising than any other trade group. One historian of advertising found that the ratio of bicycle advertisements to all other advertisements combined numbered a staggering one-in-six.⁵⁶ Convinced that money spent on marketing was money well spent, manufacturers, along with many individual retail agents, continued to pour money into advertising.

⁵³ Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 1.

⁵⁴ In the 1880s bicycles manufacturers represented three of only about seventy-four companies that advertised, on a regular basis, through national channels. James D. Norris, *Advertising and the Transformation of American Society, 1865-1920* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 40-48. For an examination of how bicycle manufacturers advertised their products through illustrative artwork see, Jack Rennert, *100 Years of Bicycle Posters* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

⁵⁵ Marchand points out, for example, that until the 1900s most advertisements were very much product centered with, around 1914, only a small group of advertisers who “had begun to appreciate the advantages of selling the benefit instead of the product—illumination instead of lighting fixtures, prestige instead of automobiles, sex appeal instead of mere soap.” Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, xxi, 10.

⁵⁶ Frank Presbrey, *The History and Development of Advertising* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 363, 412. For a broader perspective on the evolving field of marketing, particularly the beginning of national, brand name advertising see, Richard S. Tedlow, *New and Improved: The Story of Mass Marketing in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).



Figure 1.6: This 1896 poster from the Pope Manufacturing Co. illustrates the segment of advertisements designed to promote both cycling in general and brand recognition. It is also clearly targeting women. Source: “Honorable Mention #2,” *Exhibit of Columbia Bicycle Art Poster Designs*, (Hartford: Pope Manufacturing Co., 1896).

Illustrative of the industry, the Monarch Bicycle Co., launched in 1893, plowed much of its profits into advertising. It had a \$20,000 advertising budget in 1894 and by 1896, a year in which the Chicago-based firm sold 50,000 machines, it spent \$125,000 on print advertisements, its racing team, balloon launches, drop curtains in theatres, and company catalogs.⁵⁷ In the yearly catalogs, Monarch and its competitors lavished their readers with colorful images, in-depth commentary on the firms’ latest models and technological marvels, and prominent endorsements totaling, more often than not, fifty-plus pages. The 1896 catalog for Humber Cycles, for example, filled an entire page with a list of its most famous customers (John Pierpont Morgan and the Sultan of Morocco, among others). A typical catalog from A.G. Spaulding &

⁵⁷ Presbrey, *History and Development of Advertising*, 413; Ross D. Petty, “Peddling the Bicycle and the Development of Mass Marketing,” in Rob van der Plas, ed., *Cycle History: Proceedings of the 5th International Cycle History Conference, Cambridge, England, September 2-4, 1994* (San Francisco: Bicycle Books, 1995), 108-9.

Bros. offered its customers an assortment of bicycle sundries to choose from: lamps (twelve kinds), cyclometers (five kinds), locks, luggage carriers, home trainers, wrenches, oilers, whistles, bells (and a gong), bicycle stands, oils, cement, tool bags, tire heaters, saddles, tire tape, cycle brushes, bicycle hoists, rubber tires, L.A.W. badges, bicycle uniforms, bicycle caps, bicycle hoses, bicycle belts, and bicycle shoes.⁵⁸ According to the leaders of the bicycle industry, the catalogs, serving as the most direct form of advertisements, warranted great expense. Colonel Pope was convinced that every dollar spent on advertising returned, in multiple, to Columbia's coffers. Once asked about his most cherished employee, the Colonel responded: "He has been in my employ for seventeen years, yet he has never even asked for a holiday. He works both day and night, is never asleep or intoxicated, and though I pay him more than \$250,000 a year, I consider that he costs me nothing. His name is Advertisement."⁵⁹

Aside from traditional modes of advertising, Pope and his competitors found creative ways to promote their bicycles. "Columbia"-emblazoned fans cooled women on the streets, pins hung from men's lapels, and calendar pages flipped in offices around the country each month. Pope sent bicycles to boys who earned top grades and prizes to scrupulous schoolteachers. A paper model of the bicycle manufacturing complex in Hartford was sent to anyone who wanted one.⁶⁰ As bicycle racing became a popular spectator sport, drawing thousands of city dwellers to local velodromes (banked bicycle tracks) manufacturers were quick to sign the most famous athletes for endorsement deals.⁶¹ Bicycle producers sponsored racers and meets and often bragged about cycling records set atop their own brand of bicycle. Pope's Columbia, for example, was widely

⁵⁸ A.G. Spaulding & Bros, *Cycling and Photographic Catalogue* (New York, 1890); Pope Manufacturing Co., *Columbia Bicycles Catalogue* (1893); Humber & Co. America, Ltd, *Humber and Co. America Ltd Catalogue* (Westboro, MA, 1896).

⁵⁹ "Bicycles," *New York Recorder*, February 6, 1895.

⁶⁰ "The Columbia Advertising," *Printer's Ink*, February 9, 1898, 58-60.

⁶¹ Arnold, Schwinn & Co., *Fifty Years of Schwinn-Built Bicycles: The Story of the Bicycle and its Contributions to Our Way of Life* (Chicago: Arnold, Schwinn & Co, 1945), 47.

advertised as the model of choice for Thomas Stevens, who became the first person to circumnavigate the world on a bicycle (boats carried him and his wheel across the oceans).

With friends in the press and a keen sense of the yet-to-be-defined field of public relations, Pope's oversized head regularly appeared in newspapers. It was Pope who had taken the lead in (and bankrolled) the fight to open up Central Park to cyclists and it was Pope who would later spearhead the "good roads" campaign, both of which created publicity for Columbia bicycles and its founder. Pope later recalled that these public campaigns, launched by himself rather than Columbia the company, "brought [them] more good, more publicity" than any other marketing efforts. The goal was, as he recalled, quite simple: "to make the papers talk."⁶² In a creative marketing move that required far less capital but was widely praised, Pope installed an air pump outside his Boston office building, offering his customers free air anytime they needed it. The ultimate effect of these advertising ventures, according to Pope, was unabashed success: "We created the demand for bicycles with one hand, and the supply with the other."⁶³

⁶² "The Columbia Advertising," *Printer's Ink*, February 9, 1898, 58-60.

⁶³ "The Columbia Advertising," *Printer's Ink*, February 9, 1898, 58-60.

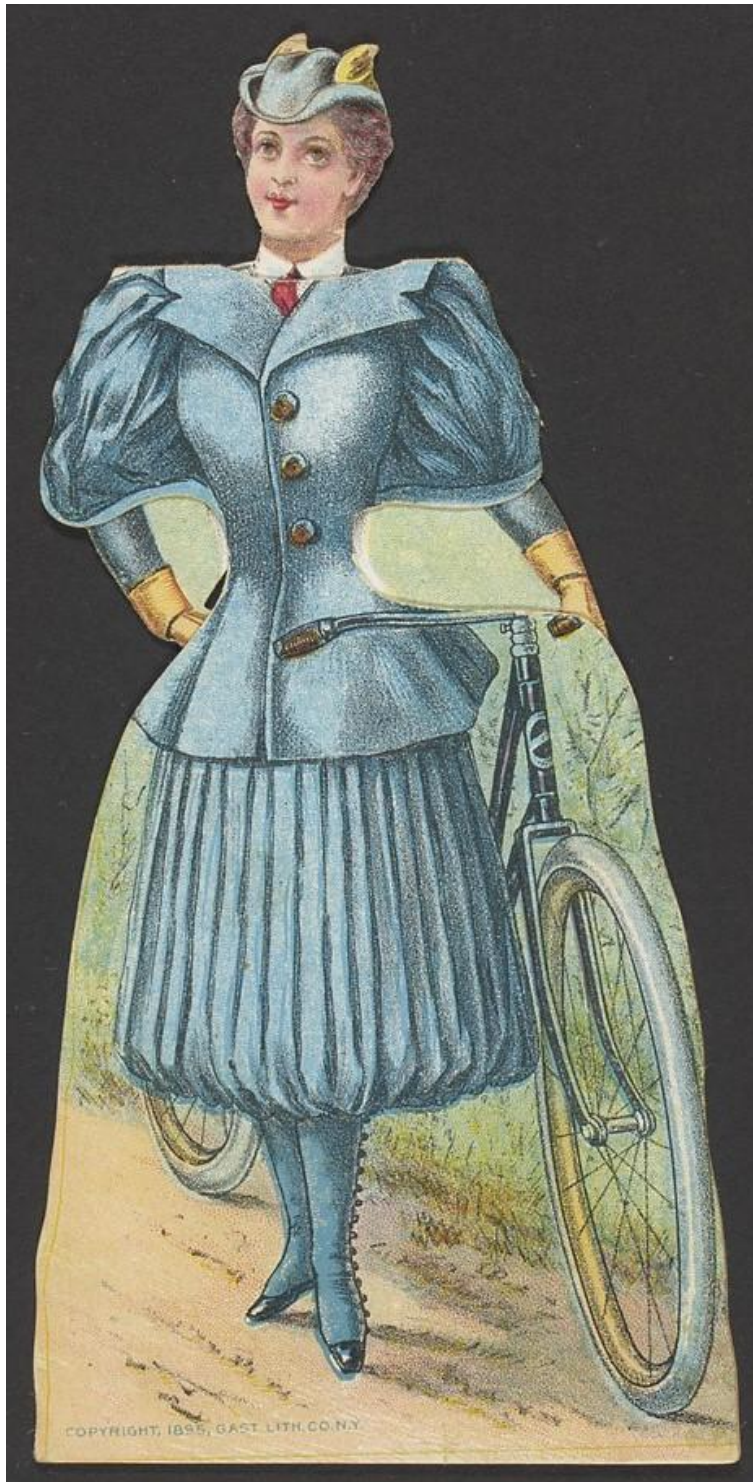


Figure 1.7: Above is one of a series of Paper Dolls distributed by the Pope Manufacturing Company in 1895. The dress and design of the doll were solicited from a nationwide contest in which women themselves designed the outfits, helping, according to the back of doll, to determine what constituted “appropriate dress.” Pope’s office sent the set of six dolls to anyone (it was clearly targeting girls) willing to send in but five two-cent stamps. Source: Baker Library, Harvard Business School, Historical Collections.

Inside the “Vatican,” as Pope’s headquarters back in Boston came to be known, was a salesroom on the ground floor and a bicycle riding school at the top, with his administrative offices sandwiched in between.⁶⁴ Pope’s was the largest, but far from the only, riding school in town. Throughout the 1890s, schools opened in nearly every major city. Since virtually no one had ever ridden a bicycle, adults had not gone through what became a childhood ritual of learning how to ride one. Instead, the millions of cyclists in the 1890s had to either teach themselves how to cycle or patronize one of the many schools emerging in urban centers. The schools offered more than just an elementary education in cycling; they provided a private setting where would-be riders could avoid the public embarrassment of trying to master the wheel. New York City alone had more than a dozen such academies. Some schools, like Macy’s Cycling Academy, were owned by retailers; others, like Spalding’s fifty-instructor academy at Madison Square Garden, by manufacturers; and still others, like the sex-segregated, upscale Metropolitan Academy, by private individuals.⁶⁵

To sell machines to the eager-to-learn, bicycle distribution, just as advertising, developed through national (and sometimes even global) channels. In the earliest years of the 1880s, bicycle salesmen visited cities, performed public demonstrations, and sold directly to consumers. But this was a temporary measure. Pope and Weston both envisioned their companies as national entities and thus established retail channels throughout the country. At the height of the bicycle boom, Pope had opened “branch houses” in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Pittsburgh, Providence, Rochester, Buffalo, Detroit, St. Louis, Portland, New Orleans,

⁶⁴ Norcliffe, “Popeism and Fordism,” 276.

⁶⁵ *New York Bicycle Directory* (New York: New Bicycle Directory Publishing Co., 1896), 29; Stuart Charles Wade, *A Bird’s-Eye View of Greater New York and its Most Magnificent Store* (New York, 1895), 61; Smith, *A Social History of the Bicycle*. For one account of a woman’s experience at a riding school and her first attempts to ride through the city see, Lillian Francia, “On a Wheel in the Metropolis,” *Sportsman’s Magazine*, October 1896, 45-50 in *Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs*, New-York Historical Society, New York.

Milwaukee, Louisville, and Washington, D.C. Yet, most machines were sold through retail outlets ranging from large sporting goods stores to specialty bicycle shops. By the last year of the century, some 40,000 bicycle dealers operated in urban centers across the country.⁶⁶ In several cities, “Bicycle Rows,” districts with a concentration of bicycle shops, where riders could purchase, rent, or repair their wheels (or simply socialize with fellow riders) appeared.⁶⁷ In especially dense cities, like New York, men and women could walk but blocks and find an array of dealers selling scores of bicycles and accessories. In one concentrated area of bicycle retailers in lower Manhattan, consumers could choose from among more than thirty bicycle shops in an area measuring just .13 square miles (figure 1.8). Stores selling bicycles and accessories and shops providing repair and/or rental services filled more than just a single neighborhood. In 1898 Chicago, for example, hundreds of such merchants could be found across the entire city in nearly every neighborhood of note (figure 1.9).

⁶⁶ Burr, “Markets as Producers and Consumers,” 312-313.

⁶⁷ For example, portions of West Madison Street and Wabash Avenue in Chicago were popularly referred to as a bicycle or cycle “row.” See, George D. Bushnell, “When Chicago Was Wheel Crazy” in Steven A. Riess and Gerald R. Gems, eds., *The Chicago Sports Reader: 100 Years of Sports in the Windy City* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 84; “Cycling,” *Outing*, July 1893, 78.



Figure 1.8: The bicycle agents, each one represented by a single green cyclist, were located using addresses provided in the *New York City Bicycle Directory* and then superimposed on a historic map (albeit dating from a couple of decades prior to the 1890s) of New York City, which was, incidentally, created by Egbert L. Viele, the future park commissioner and friend to the cyclists referenced earlier in this chapter. Sources: *New York City Bicycle Directory*, 1896; Image © 2011 DigitalGlobe, Google Earth™ mapping service.

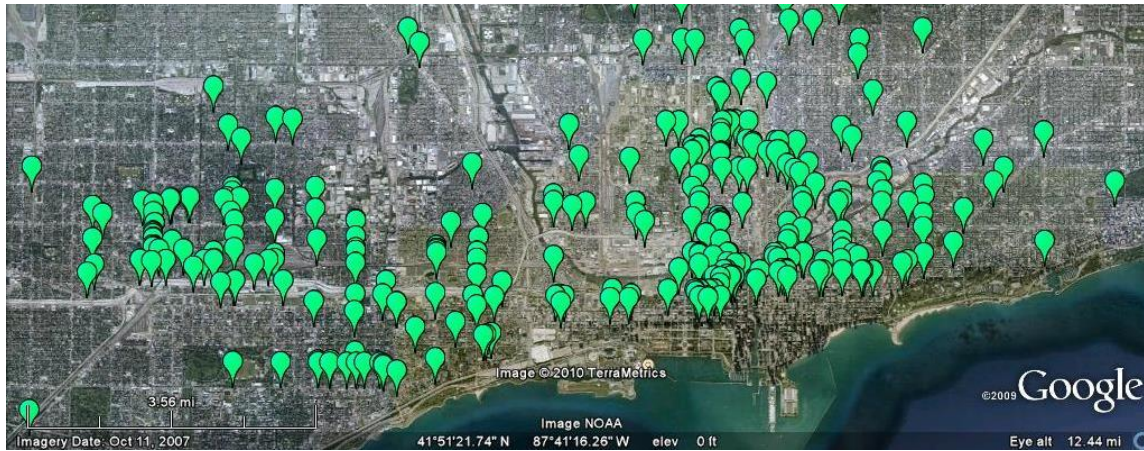


Figure 1.9: This map of Chicago, which depicts an area of approximately fourteen miles in length, highlights the hundreds of bicycle dealers in 1898 Chicago. Each green placemark represents an actual bicycle dealer operating in 1898. Sources: *Chicago Bicycle Directory: A Reference Book, 1898*; Image © 2010 TerraMetrics, Image NOAA, Google Earth™ mapping service.

With bicycle sales escalating, retailers of all varieties looked to profit from the sudden boom. It was also not uncommon for small shops, which sold nothing remotely similar to bicycles, to stock a handful of machines. In Seattle, for example, almost every store on First and Second Avenue, including grocers, barbers, gun shops, and cigar stores sold bicycles.⁶⁸ Regardless of the place of sale, the price was the same. Someone purchasing a Columbia from any member of Pope’s 2,000 retail sales agents could expect to pay the list price as printed in the Pope Manufacturing Company’s yearly catalog.

Even while Pope and his competitors launched a national retail network, targeted marketing was integral to the bicycle’s success. For example, Columbia designed rugged bicycles specifically for commercial functions like delivering mail, messages, and food. It even sold a cold-weatherproof “Yukon” bicycle made for the droves of speculators comprising the Alaskan gold rush.⁶⁹ The Colonel also invested mightily (and futilely) in promoting his bicycles as a potential weapon in war. On wheels, intelligence scouts and soldiers, he advertised, could cover

⁶⁸ Wade N. Praeger, “Fin de Cycle Seattle, the American Bicycle Craze of the 1890s” (Master’s thesis, Western Washington University, 1997), 95. See also, “The Point of View,” *Scribner’s Magazine*, June 1896, 783.

⁶⁹ Petty, “Peddling the Bicycle and the Development of Mass Marketing.” 115.

more ground and more easily tow their weapons. Yet one untapped market loomed largest: women.

With half of the population at stake, bicycle manufacturers actively targeted the female cyclist. Although some women had ridden tricycles and a relatively few had participated in the brief fervor of the velocipede or the high-wheeler, cycling had been a pastime dominated by men. Pope, who was not simply going to wait for the tides of social mores to change, began his own campaign to make female bicycle riding socially acceptable. Believing that most women fretted about learning how to ride in public, Pope's riding academy catered to Bostonian women who could experience the trials and tribulations of learning to ride in a private setting. Moreover, he developed machines and accompanying marketing campaigns designed to make bicycles a more attractive purchase for women. He and his competitors launched a series of Lady's Bicycles, many featuring specially-designed frames and mesh over the rear wheel to ensure that flowing skirts or dresses could hang freely and not get caught in any of the machine's moving parts.⁷⁰ Pope bragged that his "graceful machines are made with such lightness and ease of manipulation even delicate girls can cover miles without exhaustive fatigue."⁷¹ Nearly every manufacturer made the same arguments. The 1896 Cleveland Bicycles catalog promoted its "Ladies and misses" models as "calculated to give grace to the rider and avoid any possible feeling of awkwardness. It is a gem of perfection and dainty weight, elegant construction and finish."⁷² Pope also published and distributed an educational pamphlet entitled "Cycling for Ladies," hoping to lure more women into the market with an extended essay written by a lady cyclist,

⁷⁰ Goddard, *Colonel Albert Pope and His American Dream Machines*, 97.

⁷¹ "How the Finest Bicycles are Made," *Review of Reviews* (advertising supplement), April 1894, 19.

⁷² H.A. Lozier & Co., *Cleveland Bicycles Catalog*, 1896 in National Museum of American History Library American Trade Literature Collection, Washington, D.C.

touting the pleasure and health that comes with riding.⁷³ For any of the women readers/would-be riders who encountered prejudice toward female riders, the Pope-sponsored pamphlet boasted that when a woman makes use of her “will and determination,” she “removes all obstacles and annihilates every barrier.”⁷⁴ The design changes and marketing tactics quickly paid off. In what had been an all-male market, women soon comprised almost one-third of the entire riding population.⁷⁵

Whether marketing their machines to men or women, promoters tapped into a super-charged urban consumer culture. In the 1890s, eager sellers and insatiable buyers incited, as the historian William Leach described, “the transformation of American society into a society preoccupied with consumption, with comfort and bodily well-being, with luxury, spending, and acquisition, with more goods this year than last, more next year than this.”⁷⁶ Across a broad range of city-dwellers, consumption habits quickly expanded as luxury goods became increasingly affordable for much of the middle-class. Perhaps best characterized by the emergence of the department store in the late nineteenth century city, Americans radically altered their patterns of consumption. Hypnotized by the elaborate displays of glistening products, window-shoppers dreamed of a better, and certainly more fashionable, future.⁷⁷ Innovative department stores, like the legendary Wanamaker’s, marketed, displayed, and sold an array of goods, including bicycles, which catered to shoppers eager to take part in the process of

⁷³ Pope Manufacturing Co., *Cycling for Ladies* (Boston: Pope Mfg. Co., 1892); Ross D. Petty, “Women and the Wheel” in Rob van der Plas, ed., *Cycle History: proceedings of the 7th International Cycle History Conference, Buffalo, NY, U.S.A., September 4-6, 1996* (San Francisco: Rob van der Plas, 1997), 118-124.

⁷⁴ *Cycling for Ladies*, 15.

⁷⁵ It is difficult to estimate the exact proportion of male/female riders, but they likely comprised somewhere between one-quarter and one-third of the cycling population. “The Bicycle Industry,” *Review of Reviews* (advertising supplement) June 1896, 17; Goddard, *Colonel Albert Pope and His American Dream Machines*, 97; Petty, “Women and the Wheel,” 124; Burr, “Markets as Producers and Consumers,” 260-261; Serena Beeley, *A History of Bicycles* (Secaucus, N.J.: Wellfleet Books, 1992).

⁷⁶ Leach, *Land of Desire*, xiii. See also, Ellen Gruber Garvey, *The Adman in the Parlor: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s to 1910s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁷⁷ For more on the rise of the urban department store see Gunther Barth, *City People: The Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 110-147; Leach, *Land of Desire*.

conspicuous consumption.⁷⁸ Supplemented by the proliferation of media and advertising, urban consumer culture evolved to a point where luxury and high-fashion trickled down to the middle classes. So did bicycles. As one historian described, it was the bicycle men—manufacturers, retailers, and especially advertisers—“who first proved that an article of luxury costing \$100 could be sold to the mass.”⁷⁹

Just as department stores redefined the “shopping experience,” a coalition of bicycle manufacturers sought to display their bicycles in spectacular fashion on their own terms. While most individuals would continue to purchase wheels from local shops, department stores, or acquaintances down the street, bicycle magnates launched a series of carefully curated expositions in order to tantalize would-be buyers with style, luxury, and innovation. Even though local bicycle dealers took great care to display their wares, angling their machines, lighting their storerooms, erecting signage, placing price tags, and hanging posters according to the expert advice on “effective window dressing” found in trade magazines, manufacturers envisioned their bicycle shows as something much grander.⁸⁰ Staged with dramatic lighting, gleaming bicycles sparkled less as objects of utility, recreation, and pleasure, but more as objects of art, a marvel in their own aesthetic right.⁸¹ Objects, of course, meant to be consumed.

The first American bicycle exhibitions in the 1880s, which followed the practice begun in England with the Stanley Show, a famed bicycle exhibition, were relatively small affairs, but in the early 1890s and especially by mid-decade, bicycle shows became an important channel for marketing and selling machines. In each successive year the exhibitions grew in size, scope, and

⁷⁸ For an example of a Wanamaker advertisement for bicycles see, *Good Roads Book and the Rules of the Road Magazine, with Excellent Maps for Cyclists, Horsemen and Pedestrians* (New York: New York State Division, League of American Wheelmen, 1898), 26.

⁷⁹ Presbrey, *The History and Development of Advertising*, 412.

⁸⁰ “Effective Window Dressing,” *Cycle Age and Trade Review*, December 16, 1897, 162; *Cycle Age and Trade Review*, April 27, 1899, 790. For more on the “staging” of consumer goods see, Leach, *Land of Desire*, 39-70.

⁸¹ Nicholas Oddy, “The Cycle on Display” in Andrew Ritchie, ed., *Cycle History 16: Proceedings of the 16th International Cycling History Conference, University of California, September 2005* (San Francisco, 2006).

frequency. In New Orleans, thousands of buyers, sellers, and curious onlookers crowded the electrically illuminated Artillery Hall, which was filled with displays of the latest bicycle models, parts, and accoutrements, while Chicago and New York traded hosting duties of the larger cycling exhibitions.⁸² In both cities, the spectacle grew in tandem with the trade, as the nascent National Board of Trade of Cycle Manufacturers, a collective of the biggest and best-known bicycle-makers, invested in these elaborate festivals to celebrate their products.⁸³ In Madison Square Garden, concerts, trick riding exhibitions, displays of celebrity-owned bicycles, and elaborate banquets coincided with the hundreds of manufacturer exhibits, lectures on bicycle construction, business meetings, sales orders, and the much anticipated ceremonies in which the major manufacturers revealed their newest models.⁸⁴ Some 120,000 attended the show in 1896.⁸⁵

⁸² Dale A. Somers, "A City on Wheels: The Bicycle Era in New Orleans" *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 8, no. 3 (Summer 1967): 234.

⁸³ *New York Bicycle Directory* (New York: New Bicycle Directory Publishing Co., 1896), 5-9.

⁸⁴ "Bicycles of All Kinds; The Big Cycle Exhibit in Madison Square Garden," *New York Times*, January 8, 1894; *New York Bicycle Directory* (New York: New Bicycle Directory Publishing Co., 1896), 3.

⁸⁵ Smith, *A Social History of the Bicycle*, 33

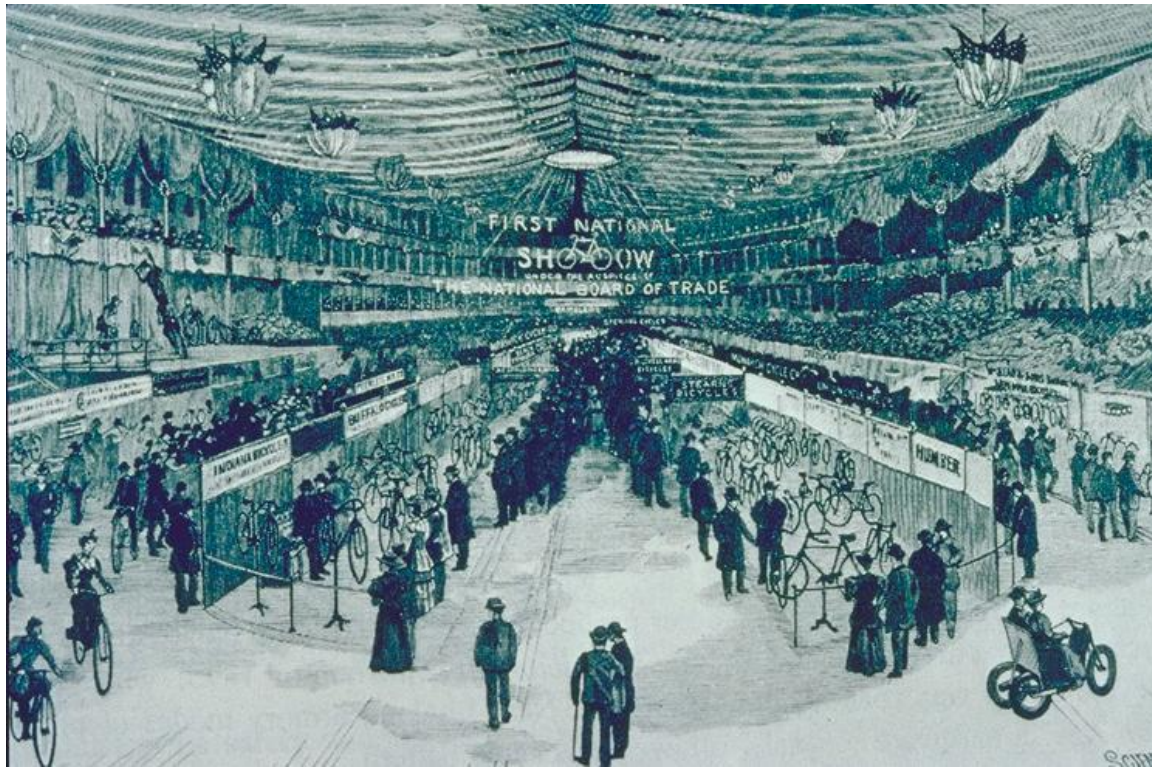


Figure 1.10: A scene from the great bicycle show at Madison Square Garden in 1895. Source: “National Bicycle Exhibition, Madison Square Garden, 1895,” *Scientific American*, February 9, 1895.



Figure 1.11: The 1896 show at Madison Square Garden opened with a dazzling display of electricity that garnered the demonstration, and its sponsor, the bicycle manufacturer Spalding, much attention. Here is a photograph of the Spalding exhibit on the floor of Madison Square Garden in 1896. Source: “Bicycle Show, Madison Square Garden. 1896,” From the Collections of the Museum of the City of New York, Byron Collection.

Likewise, Chicago's Bicycle Exhibition of 1896, despite a raging blizzard, managed to attract more than 10,000 visitors on its very first day (100,000 ultimately paid the half-dollar entrance fee) with 60,000 square feet of space devoted to 368 booths operated by 250 separate exhibitors, displays of bicycle novelties and innovations, and, of course, the "handsome souvenirs" doled out by bicycle manufactures intended to lure potential customers over to their booths.⁸⁶ Selling bicycles was, after all, the mission of these elaborate exhibitions. Local bicycle agents from urban centers across the country assembled at these regular shows, perusing the exhibits, meeting and socializing with manufactures, and ultimately ordering stock. The one-week long show in Chicago, for example, was estimated to yield \$10,000,000 worth of goods sold to bicycle agents who hoped to have correctly gauged both the size of their local market and the tastes of their local consumers for the upcoming season.⁸⁷

When the agents returned to their respective cities and shops, they waged their own marketing campaigns. Printed advertisements placed by local salesmen ran alongside those from national manufacturers, both promoting the same product and both with much to gain from improved sales. But local agents and dealers devised some unique marketing techniques as well. One such ploy involved hiring female bicycle models whose job was to seduce women into a purchase by promising beauty, grace, and newfound attention. The model/saleswoman, as one journalist wrote, had to have an ability to sell bicycles to every kind of woman: "She is a versatile young woman, this bicycle model, and for a fat woman she puts on pads to make her look stout, and she has a way of adapting her own figure to set off to advantage a suit with a narrow waist and a short skirt."⁸⁸ When modeling bicycle suits, the saleswoman would mount a

⁸⁶ "Opening their Big Show," *New York Times*, January 5, 1896; Bushnell, "When Chicago was Wheel Crazy" 88.

⁸⁷ "Opening their Big Show," *New York Times*, January 5, 1896.

⁸⁸ "A Day with a Bicycle Model," *New York Journal*, September 27, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

wheel providing a distorted mirror for the customer, showing the potential buyer how magnificent she could look in her new outfit and atop her new bicycle. In an in-depth interview, a bicycle model named Helen Ward described the real secret to selling bicycles. “A bicycle model” she said “must be good looking if she can; a good figure she must have, anyway. That’s a foregone ultimatum, the sine qua non of all bicycle models. She must be what we call triggy. Neat in her waist, long in limb, and of that peculiar build that can wear almost any size clothes...I can wear a 34 bust or a 40, and can walk in any length skirt.” Ward also confessed that a model must be an expert rider, able to ride “gracefully down the store,” making it seem “without effort.” But it was the cycling costume that made the sale, according to Ward. Consequently, she would try on as many as 100 suits a day for potential customers. To sell even more bicycles, models would surreptitiously plant themselves in a cycling class for beginners, where a “stylish young woman,” as Helen vainly described herself, would display unmatched grace for a beginning rider and inevitably field questions from envious women and intrigued husbands about where she bought her cycling suit and her “nickel-plated wheel.” Inquiries from eager spectators looking to enlist in the cycling academy and earn a spot among cycling’s fashionable corps also led to more revenue for the school and more commissions for the model.⁸⁹ Cycling schools also employed their own sharply dressed girls to ride around town promoting their business.⁹⁰

Although urban women adopted the bicycle at a feverish pace, they were not without their detractors. But the once-thundering voices of opposition had quieted as cycling moved from the extraordinary to the ordinary. Initially, a select group of doctors had warned about women engaging in excessive exercise, but the bicycle era’s peak occurred within the context of

⁸⁹ “A Model in Bloomers,” *Columbus State Journal*, September 27, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

⁹⁰ Smith, *A Social History of the Bicycle*, 27; “Among the Wheelmen,” *New York Times*, April 5, 1896.

a new doctrine of physical health. By the mid-1890s, with many doctors now suggesting steady doses of exercise, bicycle riding became a favorite prescription. For women and men alike, one doctor remarked that the bicycle “solves, beyond any question, the problem of exercise for a very large class of our patients.”⁹¹ Physicians’ embrace of exercise coincided with a new American appetite for leisure, sports, and nature. As part of what the historian John Higham has termed “The Reorientation of American Culture in the 1890’s,” Americans grew weary of the “dullness of urban-industrial culture” by zealously seeking adventure, refuge in nature, and a sporting life.⁹² As a result, parks and wildlife sanctuaries attracted crowds of visitors, participation in college athletics soared, and golf drew a faithful following. The renewed interest in nature, combined with increased leisure time, cultivated a new era of tourism. Whether it was a several hour trip to the neighboring countryside or a multi-day journey across the country, bicycles served an adventurous set of Americans looking to explore. Cycling clubs organized century runs (100 mile rides) out and back from cities and local divisions of the L.A.W. printed touring maps detailed with favored routes, road conditions, and the locations of bicycle-friendly hotels.

Even the economic depression that debilitated American manufacturing and yielded massive unemployment throughout much of the 1890s could not temper the impending cycling explosion. As factories stood still and nervous capitalists watched industrial demand sag and prices drop, bicycles remained such an attractive purchase that production soared. In the ten year span from 1891-1900 some estimate that domestic producers churned out more than 8,000,000 bicycles, a 2,800 percent increase from the decade prior.⁹³

⁹¹ Pratt, *What & Why*, 64.

⁹² John Higham, “The Reorientation of American Culture in the 1890’s,” in John Weiss, *The Origins of Modern Consciousness* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1965). See also, John Rickards Betts, “The Technological Revolution and the Rise of Sport, 1850-1900,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 40, no. 2 (September, 1953): 232.

⁹³ For more on the number of bicycles produced, see, Bruce Epperson, “How Many Bikes,” in *Cycle History 11: Proceedings of the 11th International Cycling History Conference, Osaka, Japan, 23-25 August 2000* (San

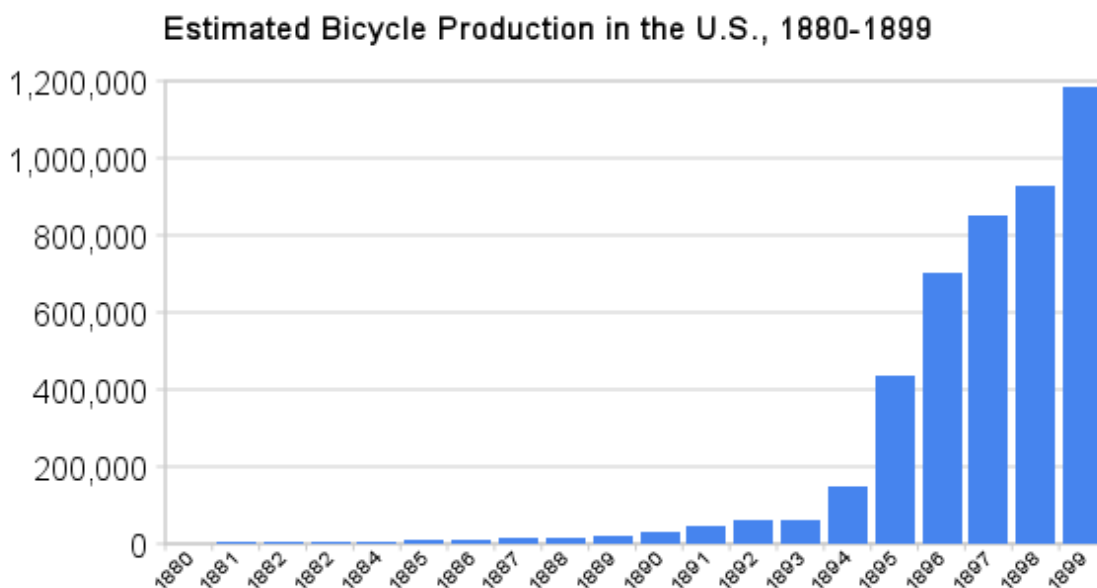


Figure 1.12: Since some bicycles made in the United States were exported, these numbers do not correlate exactly to the number of bicycles purchased domestically. However, these production estimates are rather conservative, as some scholars, for example, have estimated that two million bicycles were produced in 1898 alone. Source: Bruce Epperson, “How Many Bikes,” in Andrew Ritchie and Rob van der Plas, eds., *Cycle History 11: Proceedings of the 11th International Cycling History Conference, Osaka, Japan, 23-25 August 2000* (San Francisco: Van der Plas; Poole: Chris Lloyd, 2001) with a minor revision provided by the author.

The bicycle economy was so robust in such lean times that contemporaries in other industries blamed the bicycle for their anemic sales. The *Baltimore Sun* calculated that almost \$100,000,000 was spent “toward the gratification of cycle fever” and, as a result, other forms of transportation, instruments of leisure, and luxury goods suffered: liveries lost \$20,000,000; saddlery and carriage factories \$25,000,000; jewelers \$10,000,000; tailors \$10,000,000; piano makers \$3,500,000; cigar dealers \$7,000,000; street railways \$3,000,000; liquor dealers \$2,500,000.⁹⁴ In tough economic times, when many Americans could no longer afford to indulge in luxury and recreation, cycling offered a potentially lower-cost and perhaps more

Francisco: Van der Plas; Poole: Chris Lloyd, 2001). Epperson claims that the traditional estimates of bicycle production, including the figure that more than 8 million bicycles were produced from 1891-1900, are overblown. His own estimate for this period puts the number of bicycles made in the United States closer to 5.5 million. Statistical data, corporate records, press reports, and anecdotal evidence reveal that the actual numbers are likely in between the two estimates, but probably closer to Epperson’s more conservative approximation.

⁹⁴ “Listen to His Tale of Woe,” *Baltimore Sun*, June 15, 1896.

enjoyable leisure activity that replaced, at least for some urban riders, consumption of traditional luxury goods. Also, since buyers could purchase bicycles (used or new) via installment plans, consumers often found the upfront costs affordable.

By 1897, as the four-year financial panic ebbed, the ranks of cyclists mushroomed. The vast majority of these urban cyclists were newcomers who had purchased their vehicles within the 1893-1897 economic maelstrom. The number of cycling clubs, once the refuge for small groups of well-to-do men, multiplied as well. By 1896 there were 53 such organizations on the island of Manhattan alone. Chicago claimed 54 bicycle clubs. In Denver, nearly 19 percent of city residents called themselves members of the Denver Wheelmen. And nationally, membership in the L.A.W. climbed to over 100,000 in 1897.⁹⁵

But just how many city dwellers actually rode bicycles? It is hard to say exactly, but extant reports, commentaries, and select data provide some clues to understanding how prevalent cycling was. In 1897 contemporary estimates put the number of active bicycle riders in the United States as high as five million at a time when the total urban population numbered just thirty million.⁹⁶ Five million is probably an overstatement, but the national figures certainly totaled several million. In the medium-sized city of Rochester, New York (population of 133,896 in 1890), the city clerk's office reported that 21,139 bicycles had been registered by the summer of 1896. (Incidentally, Rochester also reported a dog population of 2,819.) Almost certainly this was an undercount as many Rochester cyclists probably never registered their

⁹⁵ *New York City Bicycle Directory*, 55-59; Perry R. Duis and Glen E. Holt, "Chicago as it was: City on Wheels," Chicago, June 1979, 190; Owen D. Gutfreund, *Twentieth-Century Sprawl: Highways and the Reshaping of the American Landscape* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 62; "Gossip of the Cyclers," *New York Times*, September 26, 1897.

⁹⁶ "Tire Gossip," *Munsey's Magazine*, March 1897. Another estimated that there were four million cyclists in 1896. Alfred S. Johnson, ed., *The Cyclopedic Review of Current History*, Vol. 6 (Buffalo: Garretson, Cox & Co., 1897), 970-971; <http://www.census.gov/population/censusdata/urpop0090.txt> (accessed May 10, 2009).

wheels (or dogs).⁹⁷ Philadelphia was said to have over 80,000 “wheeling enthusiasts.”⁹⁸ Despite the omnipresent rain, somewhere between 10 and 15 percent of Seattle residents owned a bicycle.⁹⁹ In New York, a traffic count, conducted by the *New York Herald*, gives some sense of both the number of active cyclists and the reasons why they rode. On the city’s Boulevard (the popular name at the time for the portion of Broadway stretching north of 59th street), more than 14,000 riders cycled past a single corner on a seemingly average Thursday in May of 1896, cementing the well-paved roadway’s reputation as a cyclists’ paradise and favorite spot for recreational and leisure cyclists (figure 13).

In addition to the numerical data, traffic counters recorded some anecdotal observations about the character of the cyclists, which seemed to change with each passing hour. In the early morning, clerks rode to work, then children and teachers on their way to school, followed by businessmen, before a steady stream of daytime leisure riders, and then a storm of riders, some returning home from work or school, many out for an evening spin. At its busiest hour, between 8:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m., an average of thirty-seven cyclists wheeled by each minute, a statistic that speaks more to the Boulevard’s reputation as a social meeting place than to the many commuters who likely avoided the traffic and ever-present hoopla that made that roadway so famous.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ “The Wheel and the Canine,” *Union and Advertiser* (Rochester), June 15, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

⁹⁸ “The Bicycle in Evidence,” *Call* (Philadelphia), July 16, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

⁹⁹ Praeger, “Fin de Cycle Seattle, the American Bicycle Craze of the 1890s,” 20.

¹⁰⁰ The statistics, originally from, *The Wheel and Cycle Trade Review*, May 15, 1896, 74 were provided via email from Thomas Cameron Burr (March 10, 2010).

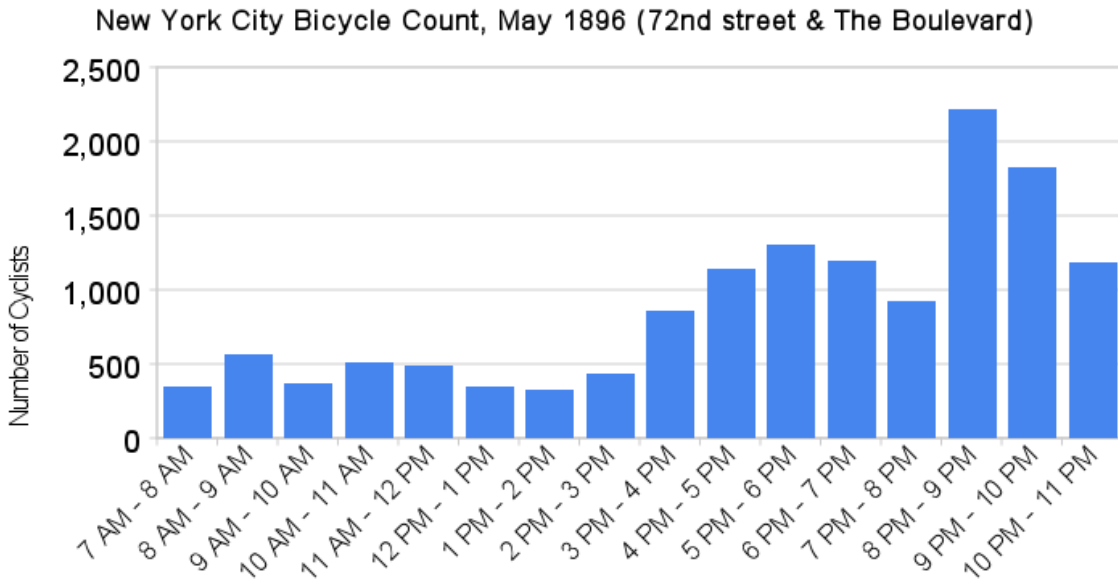


Figure 1.13: This graph illustrates the data from a bicycle traffic count conducted on a single day in May of 1896. Source: *The Wheel and Cycle Trade Review*, May 15, 1896, 74, provided via email by Thomas Cameron Burr (March 10, 2010).

In terms of the city’s total bicycle population, the *Army and Naval Journal* reported in 1896 that a “conservative estimate” of the number of bicycles owned in the city (which did not yet include Brooklyn and several of the other outer boroughs) was 300,000, with many other riders renting their wheels, thus making more than one bicycle per family and more bicycles than “carriages, trucks, horse cars and all other vehicles combined.”¹⁰¹ For some sense of comparison, the 300,000 bicycles roaming through Manhattan’s streets in the mid 1890s dwarfs the 13,237 taxis weaving through today’s city.¹⁰²

The cycling city had arrived. Spinning wheels swirled across the urban canvas. Commuters sped to work; others glided lazily around town. Rain became an enemy. Parlors and saloons filled with cycle gossip. Folded newspapers revealed cycling-related stories on both

¹⁰¹ *Army and Naval Journal*, June 20, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

¹⁰² New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission, *2008 Annual Report*, 3. http://www.nyc.gov/html/tlc/downloads/pdf/annual_report_2008.pdf

sides of the crease. As an editorialist from Richmond concluded, the bicycle “has worked a revolution, and to-day it has become an established factor in our every mode of life.”¹⁰³

Conclusion

While the advent of a light-weight, more affordable bicycle had encouraged masses of city dwellers to adopt “the wheel,” the colossal spike of riders resulted from a myriad of factors. Municipal governments, once hostile to the bicycle, gradually opened city parks and boulevards to cyclists. Bicycle manufacturers and retailers saturated newspapers and magazines with advertisements, while scores of periodicals devoted exclusively to cycling facilitated its popularity. A wave of consumerism swept across a set of middle-class urbanites with growing appetites for luxury goods. Doctors urged their patients to exercise. Men and women took up an interest in recreation, touring, and “out-of-door” activities, as Americans imbibed the tenets of, as Theodore Roosevelt would term it, “the strenuous life.” Cities, undergoing a wave of industrialization, overpopulation, and pollution, screamed for more efficient and cleaner ways to move people about and offered their citizens plenty of reasons to flee for an afternoon of nature and recreation. As such, it was the city environment—and hence a singularly urban phenomenon—that nurtured the bicycle’s explosive growth. Truly, the “age of the bicycle” emerged at the confluence of the “age of industrialization,” the “age of the machine,” the “age of muscle,” the “age of leisure,” and the “age of the city.” As a result, with bicycles maintaining a near ubiquitous presence in American cities, the “bicycle craze” hit its stride in the mid 1890s. And it did not take long for cyclists to recognize their collective interests and begin to reshape their urban world.

¹⁰³ “The Bicycle Fever,” *The Times* (Richmond), June 4, 1896.

Chapter 2

Building the Cycling City

In the 1890s, American cities were in the midst of a great transformation. Immigrants poured in. Populations swelled. And public infrastructure was forced to catch up. How would clean, potable water be delivered to the masses? How could a city of acres house a population of millions? How could people, cargo, and commerce circulate most efficiently? All of these critical questions, and the ways in which American cities answered them, helped to redefine and remodel the built environment. Chief among them was the question of transportation, which had far reaching effects on the environment, aesthetic, and design of cities. With horse-drawn vehicles came piles of manure and a foul stench that became inextricably linked with urban living. Elevated trains added mechanical noise and cast shadows over the city. Eventually subways, although often invisible, rattled buildings and real estate values. Perhaps most obviously, the twentieth-century city, with countless parking meters, garages, gas stations, honking horns, and its asthmatic population, owed much of its shape to the automobile. But before automobiles dominated private transportation, bicycles and their advocates had a chance to shape the physical city.

That cities in history are so often defined by the nature of their predominant mode of transportation (e.g. the walking city) reveals the centrality of mobility to the urban environment. While historian Sam Bass Warner, Jr.'s pioneering book, *Streetcar Suburbs*, may have overemphasized, or more exactly, singularly emphasized, the process by which streetcar development shaped the contours of residential neighborhoods on Boston's fringe, recent historians who have eschewed such studies as too deterministic have often failed to provide their

own models for urban historical development.¹ To be sure, some have portrayed city development too passively, focusing only on a particular agent of change (e.g. streetcars) and a particular subject of that change (e.g. suburban development), and in the process have cast the city as an inorganic blob, merely absorbing the impact of external factors. But causality between transportation and city form is not a one-way street. Transportation alters the development of cities and the development of cities demands new forms of transportation. No kind of syllogistic reasoning can untangle the relationship.

Like the much-studied streetcar, bicycles altered the design of American cities. But the nature of that change was contested, altered, and filtered by the city itself. It was the city's politicians, reformers, cyclists, carriage owners; its cultural tradition and predominant social mores; its political infrastructure; its geography and ecology; and even its architectural taste that determined the shape of urban transportation as much as urban transportation determined the shape of the city.

The very first cities, like those formed in ancient Mesopotamia, contained residential units, social meeting places, and trading centers all within a well defined, dense nucleus. Mobility was limited. Thousands of years later, stone walls fortified medieval cities and confined city growth and urban mobility.² Wall-less American cities, by contrast, invited thirsty speculators and territorial expansion. But it was not until the nineteenth century that the technological tools had advanced enough to enable a genuine transportation revolution. Railroads and canals linked distant cities, dramatically reducing shipping costs, and in the

¹ Sam Bass Warner, *Streetcar Suburbs: the Process of Growth in Boston, 1870-1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962). For more on the transition in the literature on Urban History away from technological determinism toward a more cultural approach for understanding city development, see Timothy J. Gilfoyle, "White Cities, Linguistic Turns, and Disneylands: The New Paradigms of Urban History," *Reviews in American History*, 26.1 (1998): 175-204.

² See Lewis Mumford, *The City in History* (New York: A Harvest Book, 1961).

process, unleashed an unprecedented wave of industrialism. Likewise, within America's cities, innovative transportation technology facilitated production and capital markets. By mid-century, horse-drawn omnibuses carried more cargo and people than ever before. Street railways, generally pulled by horses and occasionally by steam engines, increased speed and comfort for riders. In the early 1880s, elevated trains transported hundreds of thousands of people, earning a place on the urban map despite being expensive to ride, hard on the eyes, and damaging to the ears. By the end of the 1880s, electric-powered street railways replaced the horse-pulled variety, promising faster speeds. Even more widespread was the cable car, originally devised for San Francisco's slippery hills, but ultimately adopted in Philadelphia, Chicago, and elsewhere.³ Finally, at the very dawn of the twentieth century, Boston became the first American city with an underground train system. Urban transportation would never be the same. Profound innovations in the field of transportation came quickly and often in the nineteenth century. In those one hundred years, transportation technology probably evolved more than it had in the previous ten thousand years.

By the 1890s, as cycling peaked in popularity, urban cyclists moved within a complex web of urban infrastructure and transportation choices. In the final decade of the nineteenth century, San Francisco's cable cars, Chicago's elevated trains, and the street railways, omnibuses, horse cabs, carriages and remnant horsecars present in so many cities offered urbanites a variety of ways to move about. Nearly everyone, though, in one form or another, traveled via the street. The elevated trains and the subways represented obvious attempts to reduce street traffic, but the elevateds came with a host of problems—construction expense,

³ Arthur Meier Schlesinger, *The Rise of the City, 1878-1898* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933), 90-92; Clay McShane and Joel A. Tarr, *The Horse in the City: Living Machines in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 57-70.

noise, shadows—and the days of comprehensive subway systems in the United States were still years away.

With urban population densities skyrocketing, streets that had once been playgrounds for children, open-air shopping markets, or de facto front porches became closer to, by the turn of the twentieth century, the streets as we know them today.⁴ No longer conceived of as a *public* space, accessible to the masses who could use them to satisfy their whims, streets developed into a *city* space, governed by municipal law and for the exclusive purpose of circulating traffic in and around the city. Pedestrians would continue to use the streets, but at great peril and amid an unorganized hodgepodge of individual carriage drivers, cyclists, and an eclectic mix of privately-managed public transit options.



Figure 2.1: An 1896 photograph of the corner of Bedford and Atlantic avenues in Brooklyn, New York. The image reveals the widespread use of the bicycle and that cyclists rode among horses, railway cars, and pedestrians. Source: Bicycles at Bedford & Atlantic Aves, Edgar S. Thompson, Edgar S. Thompson Photograph Collection, Brooklyn Museum/Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn Collection.

⁴ For a case study of such a phenomenon see, Peter Baldwin, *Domesticating the Street: The Reform of Public Space in Hartford, 1850-1930* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999).

Facing a series of complex and strikingly modern transportation problems and an equal number of potential solutions, Americans in the 1890s lacked professional planners to turn to. Instead, the future of the city was, maybe more than it ever would be, up for grabs. Perhaps then it is not surprising that the right to draw the new blueprint for urban transportation—which included paving streets, regulating traffic, and laying down bicycle paths—was so hotly contested among private capitalists, elected officials, reformers of all stripes, and, of course, cyclists.

While various forms of transportation had redirected urban travel for decades, it was at the precipice of the twentieth century that city transportation would undergo its most sweeping changes yet. Bicycles, at the heart of this transformation of travel, left a physical footprint on American cities and imported themselves into the discussion of city design. In 1896, one wondered, “Has anybody, we wonder, thoroughly realized the change that will come over the appearance of our cities when everybody uses a bicycle?” His answer: “The changes that will ensue are so many and so great as to be unimaginable yet. A revolution is coming—may it be soon!”⁵ Indeed, traffic law was rewritten, roads built and asphalt laid, vehicles classed and separated, and bicycle paths permanently etched into the urban earth. As one journalist described the situation in 1895, the ways in which cities adapted in order to accommodate cycling were “so many and so radical as to amount virtually to making the world over again...”⁶ That world, more than ever before or ever after, was a cycling city.

⁵ “Unbounded Horseless Possibilities Opened Up,” *Toronto Truth*, August 8, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, May 26, 1896-February 11, 1897, and undated, New-York Historical Society, New York.

⁶ “Bicycle Problems and Benefits,” *The Century Magazine*, July 1895, 475.

Good Roads

On the eve of America's bicycle era, public roadways had a well-deserved bad reputation. As an 1888 U.S. government report outlined: "The common roads of the United States have been neglected and are inferior to those of any other civilized country in the world. They are deficient in every necessary qualification that is an attribute to a good road; in direction, in slope, in shape and service, and most of all, in want of repair."⁷ In comparison to railroad and canal construction in the early to mid nineteenth century, roadways had fewer supporters and received even fewer investments. The early turnpike roads, like the Pennsylvania Turnpike built in 1794, almost always failed to win public monies. Well into the nineteenth century, road improvement projects continued to be under-funded and provincially controlled. Part of the problem, as historian Michael Fein has identified, was that "public roads themselves barely registered on the public consciousness as transportation improvements. State maps from this era depict railroads, canals, and rivers, but not local roads."⁸ With internal improvement money earmarked for other projects, and with a dearth of trained engineers, little public support, and a decentralized system of road construction and maintenance, public roads suffered mightily.⁹ Poor roads, coupled with the expansion of various public transportation systems, including omnibuses, streetcars, and cable cars, created havoc in American cities. One journalist, surveying the cycling environment across some of the country's largest cities, described:

In New York [cyclists] are in momentary danger of being crushed by cable cars or run down by brewery wagons; in Brooklyn the trolley is a Juggernaut, the constant evasion of

⁷ U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture. 1888* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1889), 47.

⁸ Michael R. Fein, *Paving the Way: New York Road Building and the American State, 1880-1956* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 27.

⁹ Phillip P. Mason, "The League of American Wheelmen and the Good Roads Movement: 1880-1905," (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1957), 5, 23.

which shortens their lives; in Chicago they scurry over wooden blocks, and also perpetually dodge cable cars engineered by maniacs; in Cincinnati and Kansas City they pedal up altitudinous hills over stony streets and muddy paths; in Boston and Philadelphia and San Francisco their spines are daily impaired by rattling over the deadly cobblestone.¹⁰

The prospect of good roads and bicycles, however, promised a retooled transportation system and a new freedom of mobility. As one professional clergyman, who moonlighted as a good roads advocate, preached, in a city with smooth streets, residents “will be emancipated from the tyranny of the inconvenient elevated and the deliberate trolley.” Cyclists “will lightly spin from place to place in comfort, speed, and rare delight.”¹¹

Far and away, cyclists emerged as the most powerful agent of change in reforming American roads in the late nineteenth century. As early as 1881, observers noted the bicycle’s growing influence on the development of road construction and by the end of the decade, cyclists unequivocally asserted themselves as the chief advocates of the “good roads” campaign.¹² With limited shock-absorbing technology, nineteenth century bicycles were not able to wheel along unpaved streets, providing a new catalyst for urban paving. Other forms of transportation relied on streets, but did not depend, to the same degree, on smooth streets. Streetcars and elevateds rolled along tracks. Uneven surfaces certainly bothered horse-drivers, but not to the same degree as the teetering, narrow-wheeled bicycle. Horses themselves had the most to complain about, but they had some difficulty articulating their frustration. The future and popularity of the bicycle, however, correlated directly with the quantity and quality of smooth surfaces; few among the urban population could truly understand the disastrous nature of America’s roads better than cyclists. Knowledge of the roads, procured, as one promoter described, “by becoming at once rider and horse,” endowed the cyclists with the credentials to participate in the

¹⁰ “Hub of all Wheeldom,” *Washington Post*, September 6, 1896.

¹¹ “The Pulpit and the Bicycle,” *The Arena*, August 1895, xix.

¹² “The Future of the Bicycle,” *New York Times*, June 26, 1881.

larger movement.¹³ “No one knows the disadvantages of bad streets and roads so well as those who ride the wheel,” the *Richmond Times* commented in 1896, enabling the paper to predict that with “the great army of wheelmen and wheelwomen” expanding, their influence would “compel a much more perfect condition of country roads and city streets than we now possess.”¹⁴

Cycling Road Books from the 1890s, which offered maps, suggested routes, and detailed notes about the type and quality of road surface for touring cyclists, illuminate early cyclists’ almost obsessive concern with good roads. In a typical guidebook for urban cyclists, seasoned riders publicized their favorite routes, some on “fine macadam,” others over “rough macadam,” “across [a] stony hollow,” down “a dirt road,” through a “sandy, narrow side path,” and still others atop asphalt.¹⁵ Favored routes almost always corresponded to the best paved (and least hilly) streets.¹⁶ Contemporary diaries from individual riders also reveal that cyclists maintained a keen awareness of road quality and regularly recorded not only their routes and distances, but also the road conditions.¹⁷

¹³ “The Future of the Bicycle,” *New York Times*, June 26, 1881.

¹⁴ “The Bicycle Fever,” *The Times* (Richmond), June 4, 1896.

¹⁵ League of American Wheelmen, New York Division, *Fifty Miles around Brooklyn: A Handbook of Cycling Roads and Routes with Maps and Illustrations* (New York: New York State Division of the League of American Wheelmen, 1896); C.F. Wadsworth, *Cyclists’ Road Guide to Chicago and Vicinity: Including Maps of Milwaukee, Racine, Beloit, Evanston, Rockford, Geneva, Elgin, Aurora, and others* (Chicago: C.F. Wadsworth, 1895).

¹⁶ *Chicago Cyclers’ Guide for 1896* (Chicago: Chicago Cyclers’ Guide, 1896), 17.

¹⁷ See, for example, Joseph Bliss, *Bicycle Routes*: MS. S, 1894-1903, Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley; Frank J. Schwartz *Cycling Logbook, 1883-1888*, New-York Historical Society, New York; Arthur P.S. Hyde *Diary, 1892-1896*, New-York Historical Society, New York; Harry Adams Hersey papers, 1892-1979, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts.



Figures 2.2 and 2.3: Figure 2.2 (above) is an 1896 map for cyclists exploring California. Each road is labeled, by color and number, indicating the type of road (e.g., “Bicycle Road), the condition of the road (e.g., “G” = “Good”), and the grade of the road (“R” = “Rolling.” Figure 2.3 (below), also from 1896, is a Rand, McNally & Co. cycling map of Chicago. It features a numbered system describing road conditions. An “A” represents “Fine Cycling Roads,” while “C” streets are merely “Fair Cycling Roads.” Sources: Map of California Roads for Cyclers, 1896; Rand, McNally & Co.’s New Cyclists’ Map of Chicago and Adjacent Districts, 1896.



To the benefit of cyclists, the science of road making was in the midst of its own transformation. For much of the nineteenth century cities had experimented with a wide array of paving materials. Combinations of wood, gravel, sand, bricks, granite blocks, macadam, coal tar, and all sorts of stone had been used to lay roads. But it was not until the popularization of asphalt, a natural mixture of stone, sand, and other minerals, that well-paved roads became widely plausible. In the 1880s, a discovery of a vast, Trinidadian asphalt deposit supplied American cities with a quality and seemingly interminable supply of asphalt. That, coupled with the budding crop of professional municipal engineers in the 1890s, resulted in a wave of asphaltting in those cities that could afford it and where citizens and cyclists demanded it.¹⁸

As cyclists moved to the forefront of the incipient “good roads” movement, they joined a rather limited constituency. Municipal engineers, carriage producers, and manufacturers of paving materials and equipment all, to varying degrees, supported investment in public roads; economists touted the financial benefits of improved roads, citing potential efficiencies and increased commercial intercourse. Even though cyclists often publicized the economic benefits of road construction and improvement, their primary motivation was transparent: to extend the range of bicycle travel. To that end, cyclists worked to replace old roads with paved surfaces on which they could freely roam the city and its adjacent countryside.¹⁹

In 1888, organized cyclists, particularly the League of American Wheelmen (L.A.W.), began in earnest to take up the “good roads” effort. The timing of the L.A.W.’s involvement was no accident. Almost immediately following the passage of the “Liberty Bill” in 1887, which

¹⁸ For a detailed breakdown of the most common pavement types across major cities see, *Paving and Municipal Engineering*, April, 1896, 235. For more history on the paving materials and the growing importance of asphalt see, Clay McShane, *Down the Asphalt Path: The Automobile and the American City*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 57-63; I.B. Holley, Jr. “Blacktop: How Asphalt Paving Came to the Urban United States” *Technology and Culture* 44, no. 4 (October 2003): 703-733.

¹⁹ “Notes upon Road Progress,” *The Bearings*, February 19, 1891.

granted New York cyclists equal access to the road and was used as a model in other states, the L.A.W. reallocated its resources from emphasizing the *right* to the road to the *quality* of the road. Initially, cyclists had focused their efforts toward gaining the rights to use public roads and parks, essentially to legitimize the bicycle as an urban vehicle. But once courts and lawmakers endowed cyclists with the legal right to ride, the cyclists' efforts moved, quite literally, onto a different terrain.²⁰ In 1888, the L.A.W. amended its constitution to include road improvement as a central tenet of its organization's mission and simultaneously established an executive committee for the improvement of highways.²¹ After its initial attempts to introduce road bills (mainly to centralize and fund road building projects) failed, the L.A.W. and its supporters launched a publicity campaign to alter public opinion. From 1890 to 1895 alone, the L.A.W. spent more than \$120,000 to print and disseminate pamphlets intended to "excite a public interest in behalf of better roads and streets."²² Promoting good roads became so important that the L.A.W. even started publishing its own magazine, *Good Roads*, devoted to the subject. By 1898, about 1,250,000 copies of the then six-year old monthly magazine had been printed and distributed to L.A.W. members, politicians, libraries, and anyone who would read it.²³

In addition to the L.A.W., the most outspoken proponent of road improvement was Colonel Pope, the bushy-faced bicycle tycoon. He delivered speeches across the country touting, in his baritone voice, the bountiful benefits of smooth roads. He almost never mentioned the bicycle in these rather dull lectures, preferring instead to cite the economic treasure awaiting

²⁰ By the mid 1890s it was an established rule of law that bicycles could not be restricted from traveling on the streets and highways. George B. Clementson, *The Road Rights and Liabilities of Wheelmen* (Chicago: Callaghan & Co., 1895); "Benefits of the League," *New York Times*, March 24, 1895; "Mason, "The League of American Wheelmen and the Good Roads Movement," 76, 103.

²¹ "Mason, "The League of American Wheelmen and the Good Roads Movement," 64-65.

²² "Benefits of the League," *New York Times*, March 24, 1895.

²³ "Benefits of the League," *New York Times*, March 24, 1895.

farmers and merchants in the streets of asphalt.²⁴ As the principal owner of the nation's leading bicycle company, his stake in the good roads campaign should have been obvious. He endowed the first ever professorship in road engineering at M.I.T., successfully lobbied for the creation of a Massachusetts State Highway Commission (its membership consisted exclusively of L.A.W. members), published a series of speeches and letters on the subject, paved a portion of Boston's Columbus Avenue with his own money, and pleaded with the organizers of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition to include an exhibit on road making (again at his own expense).²⁵

Pope, the L.A.W, and ordinary cyclists used the political arena to advance their agenda. In the 1896 presidential election, the L.A.W. contacted every delegate of both the Republican and Democratic conventions insisting, albeit fruitlessly, that a "good roads plank" be folded into the official platform.²⁶ That same year, *Munsey's Magazine* remarked on the L.A.W.'s political involvement: "It has not yet launched into politics as a new 'third party,' nor has it nominated a candidate for the Presidency, but these things may come later."²⁷ Actually, the L.A.W. was too smart for that. Remaining non-partisan was key to the organization's success in representing the interests of an enormous and growing population, many of whom would switch from party to party based on a particular candidate's "cycling record."

²⁴ Albert A. Pope, *Relation of Good Streets to the Prosperity of a City: An Address* (Boston, 1890).

²⁵ Stephen Goddard, *Colonel Albert Pope and His American Dream Machines: The Life and Times of a Bicycle Tycoon Turned Automotive Pioneer* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, 2000), 117-119; Albert A. Pope, *The Movement for Better Roads: An Address* (Boston: Pope Manufacturing Co., 1892); Pope, *Relation of Good Streets to the Prosperity of a City*; Albert A. Pope, *Road Making as a Branch of Instruction in Colleges* (Boston, 1892); Stephen Hardy, *How Boston Played: Sport, Recreation, and Community, 1865-1915* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1982), 160.

²⁶ "Good Roads," *Binghamton Leader*, June 16, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York; "The Wheelmen's Plank for Good Roads," *Chicago Tribune*, June 15, 1896. Cycling was, however, an important tool in the presidential campaign. See, Michael Taylor, "The Bicycle Boom and the Bicycle Bloc: Cycling and Politics in the 1890s" *Indiana Magazine of History* 104 (September 2009): 213-240.

²⁷ "The World Awheel," *Munsey's Magazine*, May 1896, 156.

Year after year the L.A.W.'s political organization strengthened as it lobbied and introduced new legislation to not only create and improve roads, but also to benefit the cyclists more broadly. As one distressed New Yorker complained:

When the League of American Wheelmen makes a requisition upon a legislative body it is respected. The league decided that railroads in New York State ought to transport the vehicles of bicyclists who travel by rail without charge, and the Legislature of New York has ordered it done. It was held in New York City that pedestrians would be safer in the street if the bicyclists were compelled to have brakes on their machines. The league thought brakes unnecessary, and the Common Council refused to require them.²⁸

Outside of the L.A.W., everyday cyclists banded together, flexing their political muscle in the name of bicycle-centric cities in general and “good roads” in particular. As *Century Magazine* reported in 1895, there were more than 100 wheelmen for every horseman in the United States, an advantage that cyclists recognized.²⁹ Unabashedly, the Viking Cycling Club in Chicago signaled in its prospectus that “this club and its associates control 1,800 political votes and will support those candidates favorable to wheelmen and wheeling.”³⁰ Politicians needed no such reminder.

State-wide politicians wrote often to cycling clubs and local papers pledging their allegiance to the wheelmen.³¹ In 1897 San Francisco's mayor thought it wise to join the L.A.W. and in Chicago's mayoral race of the same year, Carter Harrison began his election bid by riding a “century” (a 100 mile ride) to prove his loyalty to the city's wheelmen.³² Harrison, particularly, was well aware of Chicago's powerful “wheelmen vote” and how to manipulate it. As an avid

²⁸ “Go Easy, Bicyclists!” *Harper's Weekly*, May 23, 1896, 507-508.

²⁹ “Bicycle Problems and Benefits,” *The Century Magazine*, July 1895, 474-475.

³⁰ George D. Bushnell “When Chicago Was Wheel Crazy” in Steven A. Riess and Gerald R. Gems, eds., *The Chicago Sports Reader: 100 Years of Sports in the Windy City* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 86.

³¹ “Of Interest to New York,” *LAW Bulletin and Good Roads*, October 30, 1896, 567.

³² *L.A.W. Bulletin and Good Roads*, February 26, 1897, 211; Bushnell “When Chicago Was Wheel Crazy,” 88. In St. Paul, Minnesota too, as well as many other cities, a candidate representing the “wheelmen's interests” ran on a pro-bicycle platform for a seat in the state government. “Gossip of the Twin Cities,” *Cycle Age and Trade Review*, May 12, 1898. For more on the “bicycle bloc” and the role of cyclists in politics see, Taylor, “The Bicycle Boom and the Bicycle Bloc.”

cyclist who credited riding with providing a mental “sedative” and as a member of a local cycling club, Harrison was reminiscent of many of the voters he sought to win over—a similarity that the son of a five-time Chicago mayor highlighted throughout his campaign. To launch his mayoral campaign, Harrison orchestrated a posed photograph, designed more to confer his reputation as a legitimate cyclist than to normalize his naturally narrow-set eyes or flaunt his well-groomed, pyramidal moustache. As Harrison later recalled, “What with the rakish cap, the old gray sweater and the string of eighteen pendant bars, I looked like a professional, a picture which I knew would carry weight with the vast army of Chicago wheelmen.” Supporters proudly sported buttons featuring the photograph and hardly anyone could ignore the ubiquitous posters that were hung in store windows and plastered on walls all across the city.



Figure 2.4: Above is the image of the future cycling mayor that was emblazoned on posters and other campaign media. Source: Carter Harrison Photograph, Harrison Photo Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois; Carter H. Harrison, *Stormy Years: The Autobiography of Carter H. Harrison, Five Times Mayor of Chicago* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company Publishers, 1935).

Underneath the image of the would-be mayor ran the text of his campaign slogan: “Not the Champion Cyclist; But the Cyclists' Champion.”³³ Eventually, Harrison won the election and to thank his cycling supporters, whom he credited with his victory, he fulfilled a campaign promise to lay a much-desired bicycle path.³⁴

Throughout his five-term tenure, Harrison promoted cycling and the interests of cyclists, a fact that he reminded his cycling comrades of each election season. “I understand that among the candidates for the mayoralty I am the only wheelman” Harrison wooed. “Being a wheelman myself, I am cognizant of all the wheelmen’s needs, and a glance back at the past two years during my occupancy of the mayor’s chair will show that the wheelmen’s interest have not suffered at my hands.” He proceeded to list his accomplishments: improved roads (he listed road improvement as one of his favorite “hobbies”), road extensions, dry strips of asphalt (unsprinkled with water) for the cyclists’ benefit, new cycle paths, and an epic battle with the streetcar operators that resulted in requiring new, more bicycle-friendly, rails to be used. His supporters, especially the cyclists, appreciated his efforts. He is, one Chicago rider boasted, a “friend of the boys who wear knickerbockers.” Another wrote: “Harrison.—May his tire never be punctured.”³⁵

³³ Carter H. Harrison, *Stormy Years: The Autobiography of Carter H. Harrison, Five Times Mayor of Chicago* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company Publishers, 1935), 104-105.

³⁴ Edith Ogden Harrison, Writing and Outgoing correspondence, “Bicycles and Billiards” N.D, Midwest MS Harrison Box 19 Folder 952, Newberry Library, Chicago Illinois; Encyclopedia of Chicago, “Bicycling,” <<http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/136.html>> (accessed 19 September 2009).

³⁵ *The Chicago Wheelman*, March 29, 1899. Harrison was also a frequent guest of Chicago’s Bicycle Clubs. See, for example, *Illinois Cycling Club Life*, July 1899.

WITH AN EYE ON THE WHEELMAN'S VOTE

[From Daily News of March 22nd]

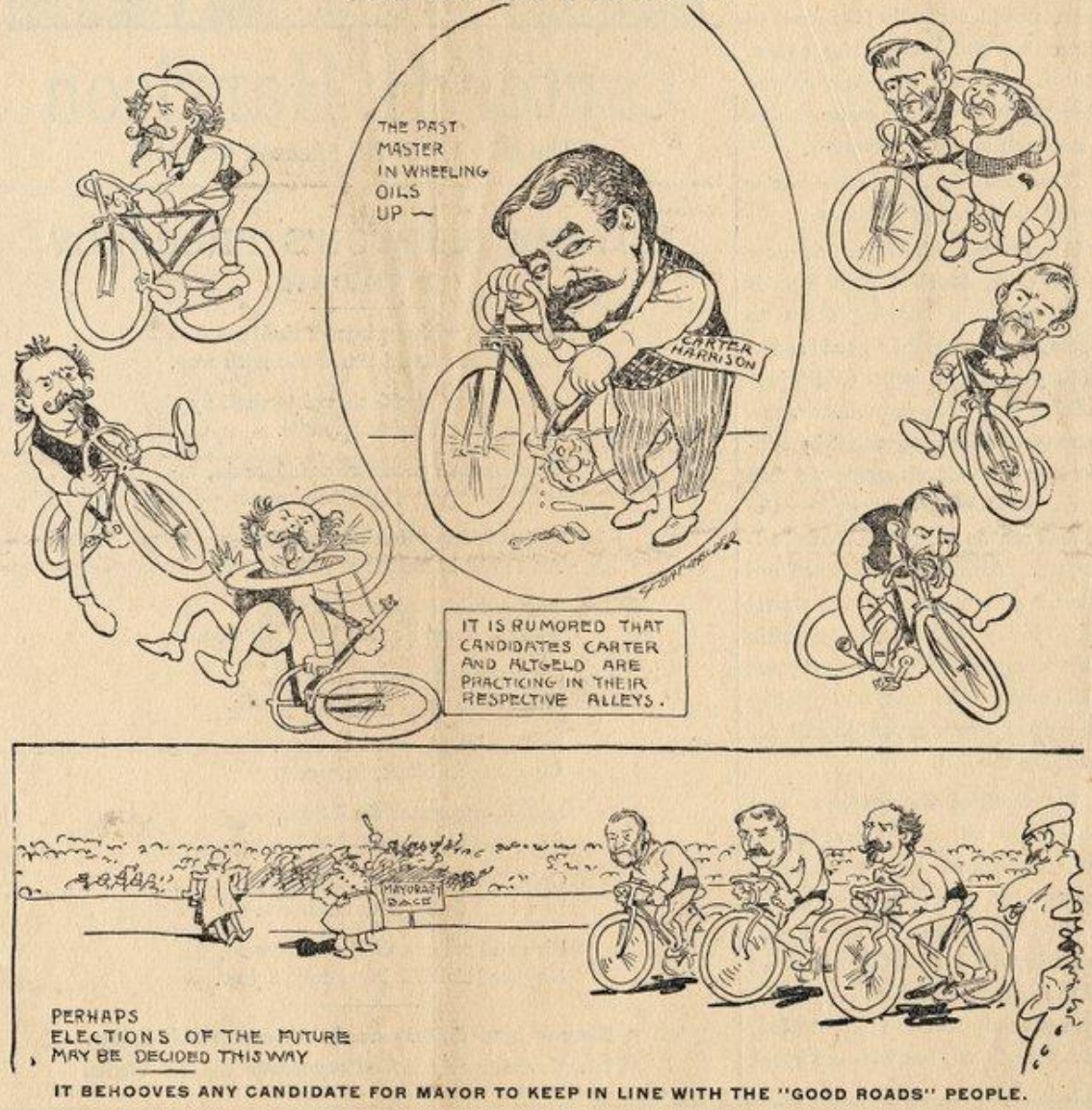


Figure 2.5: That Harrison had exploited the bicycle vote to such proportions was a theme so well appreciated that it received the attention of satirists. Pictured above is a two-part cartoon illustrating the bicycle's influential role in politics. The cartoon on top features Mayor Harrison and his bicycle surrounded by his two mayoral opponents who are desperately trying to learn how to ride, since it is believed to be a prerequisite for victory. The caption for the second cartoon, which features the three mayoral candidates racing toward the finish line of the "Mayor's Race", reads "PERHAPS ELECTIONS OF THE FUTURE MAY BE DECIDED THIS WAY. IT BEHOOVES ANY CANDIDATE FOR MAYOR TO KEEP IN LINE WITH THE 'GOOD ROADS' PEOPLE." Source: "With An Eye to the Wheelmen's Vote," *Chicago Wheelman*, March 29, 1899. Courtesy of the Chicago Historical Museum.

Cyclists not only lobbied for road improvement, but they also often played a critical role in the road construction process itself. Oftentimes, the cyclists proposed the paving of particular roads, found creative ways to fund the projects, and nearly always supervised (and often complained about) the construction. In July of 1897, the Roads Committee of the Associated Cycle Clubs of New York issued a report to metropolitan cyclists offering a map of the city's streets. The guide detailed which streets had been paved and outlined the optimal routes for intra-city travel. Implicitly, at least, the map also served as a trophy, as the miles of smooth streets symbolized the cyclists' tremendous influence. According to a *New York Times* reporter, the Commissioner of the Department of Street Improvement "made nearly every improvement suggested by the [cycling] committee," rendering the city's wheelmen the "most constant and the most important factor" in road improvement.³⁶ The list of public works projects ran several paragraphs long and cut across a giant swath of the city. The sudden increase in road improvement construction derived from both city officials and city cyclists who, more than occasionally, co-planned future projects. As a New York columnist reported in 1897, "improvements for cyclists in this city are scheduled on a large scale by the New York Consulate of the League of American Wheelmen." The cycling organization's Committee on Streets and Highways, in concert with the city's Department of Public Works, outlined the necessary road improvement projects and jointly monitored road conditions.³⁷ Even without an official role in the planning of public works, cyclists formed a boisterous body of street inspectors that civic leaders could hardly ignore. One protest in 1896 highlighted the growing influence that cyclists exerted over the city's design and its roads in particular.

³⁶ "News for the Wheelmen," *New York Times*, July 18, 1897; "The Modern Bicycle," *New York Times*, August 13, 1894.

³⁷ "Of Benefit to Wheelmen," *New York Times*, April 7, 1897.

San Francisco, despite its trademark hills and cobblestone streets, boasted a sizeable bicycle population (one estimate put the number at 65,000³⁸). Like cyclists in other cities, San Francisco's riders demanded that their city be redesigned according to their needs. Thoroughfares and parks, they petitioned, needed to be illuminated, traffic regulated, and streets widened, paved, and beautified. Perhaps most importantly, cable cars needed to be put in their place. The nemesis of many San Franciscan cyclists, cable cars imprinted onto the city a number of physical obstacles detrimental to cycling. Moving cable cars forced cyclists to dodge their way through the city, while miles of rail tracks made for un-navigable trips, frequent accidents, and plenty of ill will. In particular, cyclists rallied against the river of dormant tracks that remained only as a monument to a long-gone cable car franchise. Even though the tracks were no longer in use, if a company still owned the franchise, it still owned the tracks. Some alleged that the cable car operators purposefully left the tracks on the streets in order to vex their chief competitor, the bicycle. Indeed, the remnant tracks, the space between the rails (often left unpaved), and "the slot" (the space in the road where an underground cable meets the grip of a cable car) caused perpetual headaches for cyclists and sometimes even serious accidents.³⁹

To combat the streetcar, cyclists, in an 1896 city-wide campaign, urged the city to remove the abandoned rail tracks and to pave or repave the most deplorable streets. For the cyclists, the two measures were one in the same, as it was the cable car operators who were the chief impediment to the urban, "good roads" effort. The main battle in the war between San Francisco's transportation alternatives centered on Market Street, a main artery and crowded thoroughfare in the heart of the fog-filled city. Cyclists argued that the Market Street Railway,

³⁸ "The Mad Biking Days," *San Francisco Examiner*, February 5, 1925.

³⁹ Hank Chapot, "The Great Bicycle Protest of 1896," *Processed World* 2.001 (2001): 64-68. Similarly, in Toronto, cyclists alleged that the streetcar operators liked to water its tracks, making the paving extra slippery for cyclists. Christopher Armstrong and H.V. Nelles, *The Revenge of the Methodist Bicycle Company: Sunday Streetcars and Municipal Reform in Toronto, 1888-1897* (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates Limited, 1977), 170.

which operated cable cars on the same-named street, was to blame for the street's miserable condition. Pitted against their rival, San Francisco riders gathered together for a massive parade to protest against the encroaching cable car corporations, to demand better roads, and to demonstrate and celebrate their growing might.

With lanterns lighting their path, thousands of wheelmen and wheelwomen pedaled their way through downtown San Francisco, cruising past an estimated 100,000 spectators. Divisions composed of civic improvement associations, bicycle policemen, an array of cycling clubs, including the Union Iron Works Wheelmen, the Bay City Wheelmen, the Mail-Carriers' Cycling Club, the Ladies' Alpha Cycling Club, and about twenty-five other clubs, in addition to an unwieldy group of "unattached" cyclists managed to stay together despite the persistent interruption of oncoming cable cars. On the way to Market Street, the parade's final destination, bonfires raged, house lights flickered, and orators preached as fireworks boomed in the distance. At Folsom Street, which had just recently been repaved thanks to a campaign by city cyclists, throngs raucously applauded the new asphalt. Despite its carnival atmosphere, the parade was about something much more. It was politics.

With funeral dirges playing, the cycling paraders walked their machines across Market Street in protest to "mourn" the street's dilapidated condition.⁴⁰ One float featured a hanging dummy and a verbal threat to any anti-good roads politician. Another banner that read, "We are looking for the man who objects to the repaving of Market Street," flapped above a collection of hearses.⁴¹ And a few determined participants nearly started an all-out riot when they ripped up patches of wooden block pavement (widely acknowledged as a sub-par paving material). Some of the wood found its way onto the cable car tracks, along with other debris and a number of

⁴⁰ "Big Parade of the Wheelmen," (San Francisco) *Evening Post*, July 8, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

⁴¹ "Cyclers March the Streets in Mute Appeal for Good Pavements," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 26, 1896.

angry demonstrators determined to block traffic. As the cable cars approached the various obstacles, the mob engaged in, what reporters termed “warfare on the cable cars” as they hurled objects through the windows and (unsuccessfully) attempted to flip the cars.⁴²



Figure 2.6: The protests made the front page of the *San Francisco Call*. Source: “San Francisco Bicycle Riders as Disciples of Progress,” *San Francisco Call*, July 26, 1896.

Tensions finally simmered when a series of speakers addressed the raucous crowd. At the podium, the president of the Cycle Board of Trade recapped the rationale for the protest and the expected results:

⁴² “An Incipient Riot on Market Street,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 26, 1896.

The objects of our demonstration as wheelmen are three-fold. Primarily, to educate us all to a realizing sense of our own strength and possible influence. Secondly, to rejoice with our South Side friends over the improvement of Folsom street; and lastly, to protest most vigorously against the condition of San Francisco pavements in general and Market street in particular. Similar demonstrations in sister cities have resulted in such an awakening of the public mind to public action that to-day the bicycle is conceded to be the greatest boon of modern invention, if for nothing more than for its accomplishments in the betterment of city streets and country roads. I trust that the objects of this demonstration are accomplished and that from to-night we may date a new era for San Francisco and her pavements.⁴³

The speaker was right. Concessions to the cyclists came quickly. Market Street was repaved and new boulevard and bicycle path projects were launched. San Francisco's cycling community had proven its fortitude.

Mass transit operators and city cyclists clashed in other cities as well. In Philadelphia, streetcar operators responsible for paving and maintaining the pavements around their tracks often did so poorly, critics surmised, to damage their "most formidable rival."⁴⁴ "With good roads," one cycling advocate reasoned, "urban workers would ride to their places of business" and "it would cut into the income of the tyrannical street railroad."⁴⁵ In fact, city surveys and streetcar receipts revealed that the popularity of cycling softened streetcar revenues significantly.⁴⁶ In Chicago, too, cyclists and a streetcar operator fought over city space when a rail franchise sought the rights to place tracks on Jackson Street, a popular city street and cycling thoroughfare. In a sweeping protest, city cyclists demanded not only that Chicago aldermen table the plan to lay streetcar tracks, but that they also transform Jackson Street into a bicycle-only boulevard. Protesters donned yellow ribbons inscribed with their demand: "Jackson Street must be boulevarded." City officials bowed to the masses and enacted the "yellow ribbon

⁴³ "Cyclers March the Streets in Mute Appeal for Good Pavements," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 26, 1896.

⁴⁴ Frederic W. Spears, *The Street Railway System of Philadelphia its History and Present Condition* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1897), 63-66.

⁴⁵ Chapot, "The Great Bicycle Protest of 1896," 64-68.

⁴⁶ Interstate Commerce Commission, *Twelfth Annual Convention of Railroad Commissioners, May 1900* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1900), 36.

ordinance,” transforming Jackson Street into a wheeling paradise.⁴⁷ Conversely, in Buffalo, existing asphalt had been replaced with stone blocks on the space between the street railway track and its periphery. When a Buffalo city engineer was asked whether or not the city’s cyclists approved of such a seemingly anti-cycling measure he responded, “They do not pay the bills, so we do not allow them to dictate.”⁴⁸

Undeniably, most cyclists contributed nothing directly to the city budget. Streetcar corporations, on the other hand, paid handsome license fees in exchange for a lease on city roads and the freedom to operate with relatively few regulations.⁴⁹ While the rise of the private automobile is often seen as the driving force behind the decline of public transportation in the twentieth century—partly as a result of public policy that favored private transportation—it appears that in the 1890s, when mass transit often served as a quasi-public/private partnership, municipal governments often promoted privately-run public transportation.⁵⁰ Bicycles however, as independent vehicles, required no leases from the city and no special infrastructure. But as cyclists began to lay claim to more of the city, some municipal governments sought to profit from cycling’s mounting popularity.

The idea of a bicycle tax was floated in several cities to help offset the costs of accommodating bicycles. In other cities it was the cyclists themselves who, through their contributions, hoped to gain even greater control in shaping the city. In New York, authorities proposed, albeit unsuccessfully, a bicycle tax plan under the guise of “regulat[ing] bicycle riding

⁴⁷ Bushnell, “When Chicago Was Wheel Crazy,” 88.

⁴⁸ *Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Convention of the American Society of Municipal Improvements* (Milwaukee: Swain & Tate Co., 1897), 214-215.

⁴⁹ In general the private firms which ran streetcar lines faced few restrictions, particularly in comparison to Europe where municipalities regulated public transit more heavily. John P. McKay, “Comparative Perspective on Transit in Europe and the United States, 1850-1914” in Joel A. Tarr and Gabriel Dupuy, eds., *Technology and the Rise of the Networked City in Europe and America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 6-7.

⁵⁰ See Sylvester Baxter, “Public Control of Urban Transit,” *The Cosmopolitan*, November 1894, 54-60; Paul Barrett, *The Automobile and Urban Transit: The Formation of Public Policy in Chicago, 1900-1930* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983).

and for the better protection of bicycle riders and pedestrians,” while in Pittsburgh, city officials reasoned that “anything that puts the country and the city in easy reach of each other is a benefactor greater than can be measured in dollars” and so, quite obviously, warranted a half-dollar tax.⁵¹ The one dollar, half dollar, or thirty-five cent registration fee (depending on the city) was used for a variety of purposes. In Seattle, the cyclists proposed the tax themselves in order to fund bicycle path construction, in Chicago the briefly-implemented tax amassed the “Bicycle Tax Fund” which was allotted for general improvements in the conditions for cycling, while the would-be tax in New York was earmarked to pay down the City debt.⁵²

In the cities in which a tax was levied on cyclists, the law mandated that cyclists secure a bicycle license and attach a corresponding license plate to their wheels. Riding without a license was cause for a fine and anyone riding unlawfully could have his or her license suspended. Most municipal governments, including New York, heeded complaints from angry cyclists and ultimately balked at such bicycle tax schemes because of protests about “unwarranted discrimination” and “class legislation” against the cyclists, since other vehicles were not taxed.⁵³ Yet, in Seattle, Rochester, Pittsburgh and elsewhere, the bicycle tax signaled that bicycles had officially arrived and warranted the regulation and bureaucracy that came with licensing and taxing. It also provided an opportunity (or perhaps a missed opportunity) to rebut the Buffalo

⁵¹ *Proceedings of the Board of Aldermen of the City of New York from April 7 to June 30, 1896* (New York: Martin B. Brown, 1897), 329; “Three Thousand New Bikes,” *Pittsburgh Times*, June 18, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

⁵² *Proceedings of the Board of Aldermen of the City of New York from April 7 to June 30, 1896*, 329; *Proceedings of the City Council of the City of Chicago for the Municipal Year 1897-1898* (Chicago: John F. Higgins, 1898), 612-614. In Ohio, a bicycle tax was levied throughout the entire state by the act of the state legislature. “Ohio’s Bicycle Tax,” *Cycle Age and Trade Review*, April 28, 1898. Other cities taxed bicycles in other ways, like when San Francisco levied a tax on “cycleries” or businesses that rented bikes for hire. *General Orders of the Board of Supervisors Providing Regulations for the Government of the City and County of San Francisco* (San Francisco: Phillips & Smith), 1898, 126. Few of the municipal logbooks containing records of bicycle taxes remain, but for one example, see Dauphin County Bicycle Register, 1899-1902, Pennsylvania State Archives.

⁵³ *Proceedings of the Board of Aldermen of the City of new York from April 7 to June 30, 1896*, 410; “Bicycle Tax; Baby Riders,” *New York Evening World*, June 10, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York; “Gossip of the Cyclers,” *New York Times*, May 22, 1898.

city engineer who remarked that because cyclists “do not pay the bills,” they do not control the city plan.⁵⁴ Although the vast majority of cyclists, including organized groups such as the L.A.W., opposed such measures, a few perceptive cyclists realized that by licensing and taxing their wheels there would be a permanent and ongoing source of funds dedicated to building bicycle-related infrastructure, including improved roads.⁵⁵ In the end, few cities levied direct taxes on their cyclists (even those that did often repealed the measures rather quickly because of protests), meaning that municipalities generally had no separate set of funds set aside to improve the city for the growing numbers of cyclists.

Nonetheless, cyclists fueled the effort to improve the city streets. Aside from changing the character of the city road, street paving and construction remapped the city with promises of physical expansion and progress. As the cyclists helped lay the asphalt, they also laid the foundation for municipal growth. One illustrative example involved the development of the area surrounding New York’s “Boulevard” that, as one contemporary described, signaled the boundless opportunity unleashed by navigable streets:

A few years ago Broadway disappeared in a kind of morass at Fifty-Ninth Street. From that point the "Boulevard" trailed its slimy length northward to nobody but the map-makers knew where, and, as far as the average New-Yorker was concerned, the Boulevard was a place of outer darkness. A few blocks of asphalt laid above Fifty-Ninth Street attracted the wheel-men, little shops began to appear, and people who came to watch the wheel-folk thronged the sidewalks. New-Yorkers who chanced to possess a little city pride began to inquire why the two rows of beautiful elms in the centre of the avenue were left to the companionship of rag-weed, thistles, and dog-fennel, when numbers of respectable citizens were anxious to walk in their shade. Then came the wonderful craze for the bicycle, which attacked rich and poor alike, and made the completion of the Boulevard pavement a public necessity. The rag-weed had to go, and from a howling wilderness the Boulevard in two

⁵⁴ *Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Convention of the American Society of Municipal Improvements* (Milwaukee: Swain & Tate Co., 1897), 214-215.

⁵⁵ *L.A.W. Bulletin and Goad Roads Magazine*, February 5, 1897; “Build Bicycle Paths,” *San Francisco Call*, August 4, 1897; “Tacoma’s Exclusive Cycle Bridge,” *The Cycle Age and Trade Review*, May 12, 1898, 1122; Isaac B. Potter, “The Bicycle Outlook,” *The Century Magazine*, September, 1896, 785-790.

years has become a beautiful parkway, with grass-plots and flowers and gravelled [sic] walks.⁵⁶

The new roads and smooth surfaces, like the Boulevard, precipitated changes in the city's physical structure and had lasting effects that extended far beyond the smooth surfaces.

Even after the creation of new roads, cyclists sought to ensure that existing roads stayed in useable condition. When pavement deteriorated, for example, cyclists launched public campaigns demanding that their city's Commissioner of Public Works repair objectionable roadways.⁵⁷ In Chicago, the Associated Cycle Club maintained such an influence inside City Hall that the Superintendent of Streets distributed to them specially crafted postal cards with a printed form designed for the city cyclists to note trouble spots and places for repair. When the postcards came in, municipal workers made the repairs, according to at least one wheelman, "at once."⁵⁸

When a dearth of funds obviated a full-scale paving project, cyclists succeeded in convincing city officials to develop imaginative mechanisms to make the streets more accommodating to bicycles. Some engineers carved street corners to round their hard edges, which allegedly promoted safer travel for cyclists.⁵⁹ And in many cities, riders ensured that at least strips of asphalt be laid on the roads. Running alongside the gutter, the ribbons of asphalt, essentially bicycle lanes, provided a smooth shoulder on which cyclists could traverse otherwise rocky streets. Cyclists glided along their narrow paths, their smooth mini-street within the larger street, as the rest of traffic bobbed along the underfunded portion of the road. Frequently, cyclists would determine the exact location of the strategically placed strips, such as

⁵⁶ "An Evening on the Boulevard," *Harper's Weekly*, August 28, 1897, 864. For more on the importance of Boulevards in the shaping of an urban environment see, Allan B. Jacobs, Elizabeth Macdonald, and Yodan Rofe, *The Boulevard Book: History, Evolution, Design of Multiway Boulevards* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002).

⁵⁷ See, for example a campaign in New York to improve the "abominable" conditions of New York's Eighth Avenue. "A Danger to Wheelmen," *New York Times*, May 7, 1895.

⁵⁸ *The Chicago Wheelman*, March 29, 1899.

⁵⁹ "In the Cycling World," *New York Tribune*, September 27, 1896.

Philadelphia's Broad Street or New York's Madison Avenue, designed to ensure that cyclists could move around the city without ever having to ride on an unpaved surface. This network of asphalt proved so popular in Philadelphia, for example, that the *Philadelphia Ledger* declared Broad Street nearly impossible for pedestrians to navigate with an estimated 10,000 riders rolling by on a given day.⁶⁰ The L.A.W. and the city's cycling community met relatively little resistance in their quest for these improvements, exclusively designed for cyclists. Like their brethren in Chicago, the New York wheelmen exercised such power that they even convinced the Health Board to restrict the Street Sprinkling Association from hosing down entire streets, creating a slick surface. Instead, the Board agreed to leave a three foot swath of asphalt dry for the safety and pleasure of cyclists.⁶¹

While wheelmen gained power within city halls, animosity towards cyclists lingered. Rebellious children looking to trip cyclists would sometimes cover potholes with paper or sprinkle glass on the street. The problem became so pervasive that cyclists in several cities secured passage of legislation that made the throwing of glass, tacks, nails, or other impediments meant to tumble cyclists onto the street illegal.⁶² Some city residents feared that by smoothing streets, their residential blocks would turn into cycling thoroughfares instead of the quiet blocks ideal for children to play in the afternoon sun or neighbors to loiter under the cool moonlight. In one particular case in 1895, a group of irate Brooklyn residents petitioned the city's common council against laying asphalt on a lightly-trafficked street and to instead leave the uneven

⁶⁰ "An Asphalt Strip for Cyclers," *New York Times*, June 11, 1896; *L.A.W. Bulletin and Good Roads*, April 23, 1897, 437; *L.A.W. Bulletin and Good Roads*, February 24, 1899; "Alderman and Bicycles," *New York Herald*, Sep 26, 1896, in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York; "Brooklyn Riders Plan Asphalt Strips," *Cycle Age and Trade Review*, January 26, 1899; *Municipal Engineering*, October 1896, 245.

⁶¹ "To Benefit Bicycle Riders," *New York Times*, October 24, 1895; "Streets for Wheels," *American Wheelmen*, June 20, 1896, in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

⁶² "Philadelphia Wheelmen Awake," *Cycle Age and Trade Review*, January 26, 1899; "To secure better roads," *New York Times*, May 1, 1895; *Good Roads Book and the Rules of the Road Magazine*, 1898, 23.

cobblestones. “For the safety of our children who would not be menaced by additional travel of bicycles,” the local property owners pleaded to cancel the asphaltting project.⁶³

On the whole, however, pro-cycling advocates in the 1890s exhibited enormous influence. Around the country outside observers and government officials cited cyclists as the foremost source of the increase in road-building and improvement. The *Milwaukee Journal* noted that the bicycle “has done and is doing a greater work for good common roads than any other agency, ancient or modern.”⁶⁴ It was the great army of cyclists that prompted San Francisco’s Board of Supervisors to “provide the streets with smooth surfaces between the homes of the people and their workshops, and between the parks and the residential sections and the center of the city.”⁶⁵ In New York, by 1902, the city’s paved roads would stretch for almost 1,800 miles⁶⁶—many of which laid at the behest of cyclists. Thanks to the evolution of the science of road making, the availability of asphalt, and the voices of cyclists, nearly every city’s roads improved in the 1890s; to be sure, the nature of that improvement varied from city to city. More than any other city, Washington, D.C. was commonly lauded as “Paradise for Wheelmen.”⁶⁷ Perhaps it is not surprising that the capital city which, only a few years later, became the paragon for America’s City Beautiful designs, would boast, flat, tree-lined, asphalted streets. Other cities, however, lagged. Chicago, even with its cycling mayor, was well known as a danger zone for cyclists.

Generally, the degree to which local cyclists influenced local street construction reflected, in part, the structure of the pre-federal system of road building. Until the turn of the twentieth century, road construction was governed largely by local authorities and lacked much of the

⁶³ N.P. Lewis, “From Cobblestones to Asphalt to Brick,” *Paving and Municipal Engineering*, April 1896, 234-235.

⁶⁴ “The Wheel, Present and Future,” *Journal* (Milwaukee), September 23, 1896.

⁶⁵ *San Francisco Municipal Reports for the Fiscal Year 1896-1897* (San Francisco: The Hinton Printing Company, 1897), 13.

⁶⁶ Jon C. Teaford, *Unheralded Triumph: City Government in America, 1870-1900* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 227.

⁶⁷ *L.A.W. Bulletin and Good Roads*, November 27, 1896, 694.

centralized and institutional framework that would later define internal improvement projects. “The character of the pavement on a given street has depended on chance,” a member of Chicago’s Committee on Street Paving reported in 1895, or “the whim of an Alderman or the importunity of a contractor.”⁶⁸ As such, local interest groups, like cyclists, could lobby, pay, and labor for urban road improvement while a single wheelmen-friendly alderman could push through local projects. Indeed, before city government became more centralized, local officials at the meetings of the city council or the Board of Aldermen made many of the most important decisions regarding public works and the city in general. These local officials, often representing but a small neighborhood and a narrow set of interests, decided which roads should be paved and by what means.⁶⁹

When it came to improving highways outside of the city, a chief concern of touring cyclists, a broader approach toward road reform was necessary. Leading this campaign was the L.A.W.⁷⁰ For Colonel Pope and the L.A.W., improving city streets was central, but so was improving the highways between major cities. Highways promised not only to link a network of cities, but also to offer urban cyclists an escape to the countryside. In the 1890s, recreational bicycle touring became a popular pastime and it depended directly on the number and condition of roads that extended outward from city centers. Hence, it was the cyclists that the *Atlantic Monthly* noted had incited a sudden “interest in the construction of highways which characterizes our time.”⁷¹ In addition to a media blitz, organized cyclists formed a potent political lobby in the name of highway improvement. Starting in 1889, the L.A.W. introduced a series of bills in the

⁶⁸ *Proceedings of the City Council of the City of Chicago for the Municipal Year 1894-1895* (Chicago: John F. Higgins, 1896), 2247-2252.

⁶⁹ Teaford, *Unheralded Triumph*, 6-26. For more, and a different perspective, on the issue of power and decision making in municipal politics as a whole in this era see, David Hammack, *Power and Society: Greater New York at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1982).

⁷⁰ Fein, *Paving the Way*, 4-5, 18-20.

⁷¹ Nathaniel Southgate Shaler, “The Betterment of our Highways,” *Atlantic Monthly*, October, 1892, 506.

New York Legislature, which called for the creation of a state highway commission and an appropriation of state monies to fund road building and improvement. Despite selective support, including a State Senator who conducted his re-election campaign on a platform of road improvement, most of the measures failed. But after several attempts, the New York Legislature finally passed the Higbie-Armstrong Bill in 1898 (which the chief consul of the L.A.W. helped draft and which was introduced by an Assemblyman whose only other bill mandated that railroads carry bicycles free as luggage⁷²), establishing a system for funding and building new roads. The bill (a similar version of which was submitted by cyclists in other states) laid the institutional groundwork to build highways on a massive scale.⁷³

Throughout the 1890s, the L.A.W. also lobbied state legislatures to establish road building agencies and, at the national level, pushed for a federal highway system. Reluctant farmers often opposed such measures, fearing excessive taxes and loss of local authority. As one stubborn farmer put it, “It is them bicycle fellers that want the roads...you can’t poke any of your newfangled notions into us farmers.”⁷⁴ To convince the skeptical agrarians, the L.A.W. launched a massive publicity campaign promising their rural counterparts a healthier environment, faster delivery services, and a place on an ever-expanding cultural network.⁷⁵

The allies of the good roads campaign began to see measurable results. In 1893, the federal government, heeding a suggestion from Colonel Pope, established the Office of Road Inquiry (ORI) within the Department of Agriculture. Headed by General Roy Stone, an engineer

⁷² “Good Roads Committee Report,” *Cycle Age and Trade Review*, February 10, 1898, 562; Fein, *Paving the Way*, 43.

⁷³ Mason, “The League of American Wheelmen and the Good Roads Movement,” 119-122; “Letter to the Editor from Senator William Richardson,” *Good Roads*, January 1892, 45; “Good Roads,” *New York Times*, March 20, 1898. For more on some of the early state legislation in terms of Good Roads see, Owen D. Gutfreund, *Twentieth-Century Sprawl: Highways and the Reshaping of the American Landscape* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 9-11.

⁷⁴ *Good Roads*, April 1892, 208.

⁷⁵ Isaac B. Potter, *Gospel of Good Roads: Letter to an American Farmer* (New York: The Evening Post Job Printing House, 1891); Fein, *Paving the Way*, 31.

and noted cyclist, the ORI conducted research regarding paving materials and road management, worked with agricultural institutions, and published an array of materials regarding road construction. The L.A.W.'s influence on the ORI was remarkable. The L.A.W. provided the federal bureau with funding to promote the good roads campaign, expertise in the science of road building, model legislation, and a political lobby. The private organization of cyclists even paid for almost all of the costs to publish and disseminate the literature created under the public auspices of the ORI and the Department of Agriculture.⁷⁶ On a smaller scale, the L.A.W. continued to influence highway development. It was a chief advocate of lining state roads with signposts. Guide boards warning of dangerous conditions and identifying roads, directions, and distances between towns, cyclists anticipated, would ease inter-city travel. The L.A.W. offered, at no cost to the state, to measure and certify the distances between towns, it boasted, in "fractions of a mile." In several New England states the L.A.W. secured a law mandating that townships erect signs at all major crossroads. With pride, wheelmen in New England and elsewhere put up most of the signs themselves.⁷⁷

For certain, the paving of highways and the large-scale transformation of urban streets, save the bicycle-friendly strips of asphalt, would have eventually occurred even without the vigorous army of cyclists. After all, massive road construction projects continued well after the bicycle's decline in popularity and influence. But the individual paving projects, the particular timing, the immense scope, and the specific streets chosen, were, no doubt, shaped by the pleas

⁷⁶ Mason, "The League of American Wheelmen and the Good Roads Movement," 173-175; Gregory C. Lisa, "Bicyclists and Bureaucrats: The League of American Wheelmen and Public Choice Theory Applied," *The Georgetown Law Journal* 84 (1995-1996): 387-395; Gutfreund, *Twentieth-Century Sprawl*, 11-16; Bruce E. Seely, *Building the American Highway System: Engineers as Policy Makers* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 11-23.

⁷⁷ "Benefits of the League," *New York Times*, March 24, 1895; "The Modern Bicycle," *New York Times*, August 13, 1895; Isaac B. Potter, *Cycle Paths: A Practical Hand-Book, Containing the Best Available Information to Guide Members of the League of American Wheelmen and Others in Placing in Substantial form their Protest Against Bad Roads by the Construction and Maintenance of those Temporary Blessings Known as Cycle Paths* (League of American Wheelmen, 1898), 85; "How to take care of your Motor Car," *Outing*, 1905, 373.

of cyclists. Municipal improvement was an ongoing process, but one that had to account for cyclists and their demands. As the columns of trade magazines, such as *Municipal Engineering*, which billed itself as “devoted to the improvement of cities,” revealed, any large-scale public works projects or long-term plans to build for the future had to reckon with bicycles.⁷⁸ It was no coincidence that as American cyclists gathered strength (both in numbers and political clout), street improvement projects redoubled. With paved streets, traffic increased and in the process demolished the roads’ alternative uses. Consequently, a new problem arose: how to handle the increased traffic and how to accommodate the swarms of cyclists?

⁷⁸ *Municipal Engineering* regularly followed bicycle-related issues ranging from asphalt projects to renewed guidelines for traffic law. See, for example, *Municipal Engineering*, July 1896, 34; *Municipal Engineering*, October, 1896, 245; *Municipal Engineering*, November 1896, 307; *Municipal Engineering*, December 1896, 376, 391-395.



Figures 2.7 and 2.8: Cyclists filled the streets in the mid to late 1890s as shown in these two photographs from New York's Fifth Avenue near 124th street (below) and 125th street (above) in 1897. Source: Byron Company. From the Collections of the Museum of the City of New York.



Rules of the Road

Not only had cyclists helped transform cities of mud into cities of asphalt, but their growing numbers necessitated changes to the rules of the road. “It is plain that the bicycle, in its sudden popularity, has given rise to new questions in municipal administration,” a Philadelphia newspaper opined in 1896. “The streets were originally constructed for the use of pedestrians and ordinary vehicles. The omnibus, and tram-car, drawn by horses, and the electric streetcar in turn required special regulation; but they made no radical difference in the general use of the streets. The bicycle introduces a new element. It is a vehicle of a different kind that requires different regulations.”⁷⁹ While comprehensive traffic codes, traffic lights, and signs were, for the most part, an invention of the twentieth century, cyclists, throughout the 1890s, forced municipal governments to rewrite (or create) traffic laws, alter traffic patterns, and rethink the transportation network.⁸⁰

On the new and improved roads, traffic merely increased. Cyclists rode alongside horses, omnibuses, and streetcars; in some cities, pedestrians walked freely down the streets. The sheer diversity of vehicles, coupled with the growing number of bicycles, created havoc. As one example, in 1891, Washington, D.C. licensed 548 public vehicles (e.g., omnibuses) of different varieties, not including the rapidly expanding cars in the street railway system.⁸¹ In each subsequent year, thousands of new cyclists hit the capital’s pavements, adding a complex variable to an already tangled web. Bicycles, unlike horses and streetcars, moved nearly silently

⁷⁹ “The Bicycle and its Rights,” *Philadelphia Times*, July 20, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

⁸⁰ For more on the development of how cities came to reorganize traffic in the twentieth century, particularly around the automobile, see Peter D. Norton, *Fighting Traffic: The Dawn of the Motor Age in the American City* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008).

⁸¹ *Annual Report of the Commissioners of the District of Columbia for the Year Ended June 30, 1891* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1891).

through the city, at a quickened pace (before bicycles, traffic had generally moved at a walking pace), and with the power to accelerate and turn quickly. Without traffic signals or a coordinated system to regulate traffic flow, bicycles posed their share of problems. As one journalist dramatically described in 1897, “streams of bicyclists pass each other with bewildering rapidity and mingled in the throng are heavy truck teams, carriages and all sorts of vehicles which insure a broken and dismembered corpse to the venturesome person who dares venture in.”⁸²

Hyperbole aside, the increasing popularity of cycling and the dangerous amalgamation of traffic (in Rochester, New York, for example, local police reported almost 100 accidents a day⁸³) could no longer be ignored. The *Detroit Free Press*, in a plea to its city’s common council, summarized the problem: with so few regulations and with “this appliance of civilization” being used so widely the people of Detroit traveled through the city in grave danger.⁸⁴ A series of bicycle ordinances, the newspaper suggested, was long overdue.

Eventually, most municipal governments responded to the crisis with city ordinances regulating bicycles that not only changed city traffic, but also spoke volumes about how Americans conceived of urban transportation and the bicycle’s role therein. The ways in which these ordinances were designed, debated, and applied reveals an obvious need to accommodate bicycles, but also provides a lens through which to explore how urban Americans thought about their cities and their traffic. Finally, it was the bicycle regulations that established the framework through which automobiles would move through the city. Before automobiles, it was bicycles that brought rules, regulations, and bureaucracy to the streets.

⁸² “In an About Springfield,” *Republican* (Springfield, Mass.), October 17, 1897.

⁸³ Karen McCally, “Bloomers & Bicycles: Health and Fitness in Victorian Rochester,” *Rochester History* LXIX, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 12.

⁸⁴ “Wanted: A Bicycle Ordinance,” *Detroit Free Press*, August 29, 1896.

Cities of all sizes enacted ordinances regulating bicycle traffic. By 1895 in Michigan, for example, lawmakers in nineteen out of the twenty-two largest cities felt compelled to draft specific regulations governing the bicycle. While few cities adopted exactly the same set of rules (e.g., because of their “wheelmen having defeated every measure brought before the council,” Detroit’s ordinance was hardly restrictive), municipal governments addressed similar issues.⁸⁵ Often, the ordinances banned sidewalk riding; required lamps and bells; prohibited carrying children, coasting (the practice of riding downhill with one’s feet off the pedals...famously, the Duke of Marlborough, who was in New York to marry Miss Consuelo Vanderbilt, was one of the first cyclists to be arrested for “coasting” as he cruised through Central Park with his feet casually resting on the handlebars), reckless driving, and trick or “fancy” riding; and implemented speed limits.⁸⁶ More often than not, lawmakers passed municipal legislation in piecemeal fashion, addressing issues as they arose. But as cycling became more popular throughout the 1890s, city officials reconceived traffic law and began to institute a more comprehensive approach. These comprehensive schemes often emerged from relatively narrow debates about city traffic. One such instance, surrounding the Boulevard in New York, was emblematic of both the problems and possibilities offered by the bicycle. The debate over traffic on the Boulevard led to a far-reaching series of traffic guidelines that would not only restructure New York, but many other American cities as well.

New York’s Boulevard had developed into such an attraction that the once ghostly street had become the city’s most trafficked, and contested, cycling thoroughfare. As thousands of

⁸⁵ Robert G. Steel, *Bicycle Routes in Michigan, Giving a Complete Description of the Roads of Michigan used by Wheelmen in Riding between Different Cities and Towns, with Maps* (League of American Wheelmen, Michigan Division, 1896).

⁸⁶ For an example of the comprehensive bicycle ordinances see, *Compiled Ordinances of the City of St. Paul, Minnesota. Corrected and Revised to January 1, 1906* (St. Paul: St. Paul Review Publishing Co., 1908); *Code of Ordinances of The City of New York* (New York: The Banks Law Publishing Company, 1908); *General Orders of the Board of Supervisors Providing Regulations for the Government of the City and County of San Francisco*, 362-3.

riders wheeled along each day and night, congestion, the number of accidents, and the competition for space on the roadway increased. Finally, in 1896, the New York Board of Aldermen decided that it could no longer ignore the Boulevard's traffic problems. For months, individual aldermen, city newspapers, carriage drivers, and cycling clubs participated in a public debate about the bicycle's place on the Boulevard and on city streets in general.

While the bicycle had an acknowledged right to the road by the second half of the 1890s, the burden of ensuring safe and efficient traffic circulation grew in proportion to the number of riders. In "the interest of bicyclists," an alderman introduced a resolution barring all heavy vehicles from the Boulevard for the three-plus mile span of roadway extending northward from 59th Street.⁸⁷ The alderman proposed that only bicycles and other light vehicles be allowed, arguing, in his official resolution, that the Boulevard's "heavy traffic" was dangerous to bicycles. The threat to cyclists included more than just the chance of an inadvertent accident. Alderman Robinson explained: "It is known that drivers of heavy vehicles take pleasure in running into bicycle riders, with the object of annoying them, and frequently causing serious accidents." The accidents on the Boulevard, he continued "[were] not accidents at all, but the deliberate results of drivers attempting to break the wheels of riders." In light of these malicious attacks, in response to an urgent "city demand," and taking into account that "bicycling is so universal that those who ride wheels are the representative class," the alderman sought to transform the Boulevard into a bicycle thoroughfare. In the process he incited a debate that reverberated around the nation.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ "A New Boulevard Resolution," *New York Mail and Express*, September 9, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

⁸⁸ "To Save Cyclists and the Their Wheels," *New York Journal*, September 9, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York; "Boulevard Bicyclists' Terror," *New York Sun*, July 4, 1896. There was a long history of animosity between cyclists and other drivers. In probably the most dramatic example of road rage, one teamster, angered by the rising number of bicycles, shot five passerby cyclists. Robert A. Smith, *A Social History of the Bicycle, Its Early Life and Times in America* (New York: American Heritage Press, 1972), 186.

In Memphis, Tennessee, readers perusing the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* found not only stories of local news, global affairs, and national politics, but also the saga of the Boulevard debate.⁸⁹ The *Buffalo Courier* weighed in as well, offering its own counter-proposal to construct an elevated, bicycle-only roadway spanning the entire length of Manhattan. Such a road, the paper concluded, would finally make some headway toward satisfying the wheelmen's "everlasting demands for more room on the face of the earth."⁹⁰ More broadly, *Century Magazine* boldly predicted a new era in city planning in which "we may see in all our great cities lines of streets reserved for bicycles."⁹¹

Inside New York the proposed resolution appeared popular. In an informal poll of more than 2,500 of its readers, the *New York Herald* found that nearly all of its respondents favored restricting commercial and heavy vehicles from the Boulevard.⁹² Despite the results of the dubious poll, opposition quickly surfaced. Ironically, it was the very group who, at first glance, seemed to gain the most that most adamantly opposed restricting heavy vehicles from the Boulevard. Organized cyclists, via the L.A.W., sent a public letter to the Board of Aldermen insisting that the L.A.W. and other cycling clubs had not conceived of the measure and were, in fact, "unalterably opposed to it." The letter highlighted that the L.A.W. was "delighted to find that not a single wheelman or wheelman's organization appeared before your Honorable Body to ask for such a special privilege as the exclusive use of a street on this island." Since cyclists and the L.A.W. in particular had been the primary advocates of open-access roads and having

⁸⁹ "The Bicycle Problem," *Commercial Appeal* (Memphis), September 25, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

⁹⁰ *Buffalo Courier*, October 9, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York. The idea of an elevated bicycle path spanning from Battery Park to northern Manhattan was seriously debated for several years in the mid-to-late-1890s, but never came to fruition.

⁹¹ "Bicycle Problems and Benefits," *The Century Magazine*, July 1895, 474-475.

⁹² The official poll, while highly questionable, reported 2,528 ballots for restriction of traffic and 34 ballots against. "Alderman and Bicycles," *New York Herald*, September 26, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York..

themselves been barred from the parks and the streets, the L.A.W. admitted that “it would be against our principles” to now ask that other vehicles be excluded from the roads. It vigorously opposed any kind of regulation that would restrict certain vehicles from public streets. The L.A.W. acknowledged the mounting traffic problems on the Boulevard (like many other city streets around the country) and insisted that safety concerns necessitated intervention. In lieu of the Boulevard restriction ordinance, the L.A.W. pleaded with the Board of Aldermen to give riders a roadway “free from the perils of death and maiming” and to provide cyclists with the “privilege of riding in any and all the streets without menace of life and limb which now exists” in what the L.A.W. referred to as the “most dangerous [city] on the continent for a cyclist.” The nation’s leading body of organized cyclists reiterated its demand that wagon drivers be required to carry lamps and be subject to speed limits. If roads were safe, the L.A.W. concluded, “the cry for a restricted thoroughfare [would] cease.”⁹³ Regulation trumped restriction.

The L.A.W. continued to lobby against the initial proposal barring heavy vehicles in addition to the many alternative resolutions floated in the fall of 1896. One compromise called for restricting heavy traffic for only certain hours, while the mayor suggested his own plan to divide the Boulevard into separate parts, one of which would be devoted to wheelmen.⁹⁴ General C.H.T. Collis, the Commissioner of Public Works, and New York Alderman Goodman both suggested a forward-looking plan to “stripe” the Boulevard. Both halves would be asphalted, one side black for trucks and the other white for bicycles.⁹⁵ The radical plan to segregate traffic with colored lane markers represented an obvious need to reconsider and formalize traffic flow.

⁹³ *Proceedings of the Board of Aldermen of the City of New York From October 6 to December 29, 1896* (New York: Martin B. Brown, 1897), 12-13; “Cycle News,” *New York Evening Recorder*, October 2, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

⁹⁴ *Proceedings of the Board of Aldermen of the City of New York From October 6 to December 29, 1896*, 3-4, 15; “Cycle News,” *New York Evening Recorder*, October 2, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

⁹⁵ *Proceedings of the Board of Aldermen of the City of new York From October 6 to December 29, 1896*, 35-36; “Would Stripe the Boulevard,” *New York Sun*, October 4, 1896.

Ultimately, the aldermen agreed to segregate traffic, albeit without the colored lane markers. One side was for heavy vehicles, the other for light. Making sure everyone kept to his or her own side was a corps of policemen monitoring the street from atop their own bicycles.⁹⁶ But these measures were merely temporary, as the Boulevard debate ignited a citywide discussion about, and the ultimate redrafting of, the city's traffic laws.

While many of the standard rules of the road (e.g., keep to the right) had been established by tradition, increased demand for access to the street necessitated a more formal code. Accordingly, in 1897, New York City officials finally passed a comprehensive set of traffic ordinances, the first in the nation.⁹⁷ The ordinances of 1897 marked a shift from a largely de facto system of governing traffic that depended on common sense to a new system that actively sought to define movement on those streets. The new system had widespread implications, as many other municipalities looked to New York as a model for dealing with traffic.⁹⁸ Moreover, the ordinances finally and explicitly acknowledged the bicycle as a legitimate urban vehicle, classing bicycles alongside traditional vehicles. Most remarkable of all, however, was the fact that the new guidelines governing New York's traffic, and ultimately those enacted in other major cities, were crafted and proposed by the cyclists themselves.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ "Bicycles on the Boulevard," *New York Sun*, October 20, 1896.

⁹⁷ McShane, *Down the Asphalt Path*, 50-51.

⁹⁸ Norton, *Fighting Traffic*, 50.

⁹⁹ For example, in Seattle, the Queen City Cycle Club was organized to help draft its city's cycling ordinances. Wade N. Praeger, "Fin de Cycle Seattle, the American Bicycle craze of the 1890s," (Master's Thesis, Western Washington University, 1997), 74-76.



Figures 2.9 and 2.10: Both of these photographs, taken from the Boulevard in 1898, reveal the (rather unsuccessful) efforts to separate traffic on New York's Broadway. The sign that is seen hanging over the street reads: "pleasure traffic keep over to the left, business traffic keep over to the curb." Source: Byron Company. From the Collections of the Museum of the City of New York.



The New York Division of the L.A.W. drafted a series of traffic guidelines, knowing that it was only a matter of time before the city would recognize the need for traffic governance. To prevent any future, and perhaps unfriendly, legislation, the wheelmen thought it wise to introduce their own comprehensive ordinance to ease city traffic, reduce the number of traffic accidents, and, all the while, explicitly define the bicycle as a legitimate vehicle that should be regulated as an equal alongside other primary modes of transportation. Hence, at a meeting of New York's Law Committee of the Board of Aldermen in 1897, a group of well-known citizens and prominent cyclists met to propose a new set of ordinances to govern city traffic. The cyclists might have feigned latitude and flexibility, but, like James Madison at the Constitutional Convention, they made sure their ideas made it into the final draft. The wheelmen formally introduced numerous suggestions, including regulations which required slower moving vehicles to keep to the right, drivers to use hand signals to indicate turns, and all vehicles to display lights after dark; prohibited vehicles from suddenly stopping or parking in the middle of the street; and established a minimum age (sixteen) to operate commercial vehicles.¹⁰⁰

After weeks of deliberation, the Board of Aldermen, on the last day of August 1897, concurred. The new set of "rules of the road" finally established a thorough set of traffic guidelines, repealing the barely extant vestiges of ordinances written way back in 1807 when a triumvirate of New Yorkers famously decided to turn their island into a giant, rectangular grid of intersecting streets and avenues. The vast majority of the codified rules, including the sections requiring hand signaling, bells, and lights; defining the methods of passing; establishing rights of way; and setting a minimum driving age mirrored, almost exactly, the suggestions originally made by the city's wheelmen. To be sure, many of these measures merely cemented traditional

¹⁰⁰ "News for the Wheelmen," *New York Times*, June 11, 1897; "News for the Wheelmen," *New York Times*, July 14, 1897.

practice, but other components, such as requiring hand signals and establishing a legal driving age, were radically new. Perhaps most importantly, the revised ordinances helped cement the bicycle's status as a recognized vehicle to be classed in the same category as a carriage, omnibus, etc.¹⁰¹

More than simply granting cyclists access to the roads, city officials defined appropriate cycling behavior in some bicycle-specific manners, but more often, in universal traffic codes. Bicycles *and* carriages could only pass on the left. Bicycles *and* carriages were forbidden from the sidewalks. Cyclists *and* carriage drivers were forced to use hand signals when turning a corner. Even though it was the bicycle that prompted the new traffic laws, the ordinances sought to regulate all vehicles on all public streets.¹⁰² Ironically, it was these restrictive laws that promoted the notion of bicycles as legitimate urban vehicles, subject to legitimate, official regulation. In fact, the most common complaint from cyclists about proposed ordinances in cities across the country was that the proposed rules did not apply to everyone. Requiring lamps, enforcing speed limits, and even levying bicycle taxes restricted and vexed cyclists, but riders often found such measures palatable and ultimately supported reform so long as the rules applied to all vehicles. All in all, the cyclists defined, and city officials approved, essential guidelines concerning how bicycles maneuvered through the city streets. And in so doing, cyclists provided the framework to accommodate not only the rising number of bicycles, but also other (and future) modes of transportation.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ "Gossip of the Cyclers," *New York Times*, February 11, 1895; *General Ordinances of the City of New York under the Greater New York Charter* (New York: The Banks Law Publishing Co., 1902), 128-130.

¹⁰² *General Ordinances of the City of New York under the Greater New York Charter*, 128-130.

¹⁰³ "New Rules of the Road," *New York Times*, July 28, 1897; "Wheelmen and Sidewalks," *New York Times*, June 18, 1897; *Code of Ordinances of The City of New York*. The principle of defining the bicycle as a vehicle became so commonplace in the United States that the principle was even exported to its distant territories. In the Philippines, for example, American officials declared that "Every bicycle shall be regarded as a vehicle and subject to all ordinances and regulations relating thereto. It shall carry a light when in use after dark, and a bell or whistle at all times, which shall be sounded when approaching any street crossing or intersection or any vehicle or person

Following New York's comprehensive traffic/bicycle code in 1897, other cities followed suit. Later that same year, Washington, D.C. passed its own set of rules governing traffic. Like New York, the nation's capital required cyclists to carry bells and lights (because of public protest and cries of vehicular discrimination, the Commissioners of the District of Columbia quickly rewrote the original ordinance and mandated that "all public vehicles" display lighted lamps) and instituted a mandatory speed limit—six miles an hour on streets with tracks for streetcars, twelve miles an hour on most others, and fifteen miles an hour on streets outside the dense city center. One feature of Washington, D.C.'s new traffic laws was, though, quite unique. With the goal of improving safety and to ensure that riders or drivers approaching each other could "be able to judge of the probable movement of the approaching vehicle," Section Thirty of the new ordinance outlawed bicycles featuring handlebars dipping more than four inches below the top of the saddle and mandated that riders keep their heads fully upright.¹⁰⁴ Essentially, this ordinance sought to prevent racing on D.C. streets, as bicycles designed for racing generally featured downwardly curved handlebars. The ban met a flurry of protests and legal challenges from cyclists.¹⁰⁵

At roughly the same time, the city of New Orleans enacted a series of bicycle ordinances regulating traffic by limiting cyclists' speed, prohibiting sidewalk riding, and requiring lights at night. To prevent reckless driving, the city mandated that riders keep at least one hand on the bars, while Chicago forbade its cyclists from turning corners at speeds in excess of four miles per

occupying the street." *Annual Reports of the War Department for the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 1901 Report of the Lieutenant-General Commanding the Army. In Five Parts. Part 5* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1901).

¹⁰⁴ *Annual Report of the Commissioners of the District of Columbia for the Year Ended June 30, 1898, Vol. 1.* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1898), 8-9, 13-14; "Washington's Regulations," *Cycle Age and Trade Review*, December 16, 1897, 162; "Washington Liverymen Protests," *Cycle Age and Trade Review*, December 23, 1897, 240.

¹⁰⁵ "Fred Schade's protest," January 10, 1898, in Vertical Files-Recreation Sports-Bicycling Box 20, Washington, D.C. Historical Society, Washington, D.C.

hour.¹⁰⁶ Other cities sought to mandate that bicycles be outfitted with brakes. These measures to curb speed and irresponsible driving met a mixed fate. Brake requirements in particular were often blocked by cycling organizations, who claimed they were an “infringement upon their personal property.”¹⁰⁷

Unlike other forms of urban transportation, bicycles functioned as a means of travel and as a means of recreation and sport. Scorchers (the pejorative term for a particular type of brazen cyclist who raced through the streets with little regard for others) enjoyed speed for its own sake. Touring cyclists wanted to explore, not commute. In dealing with such a variety of cyclists, municipal governments faced the challenge of drafting universal cycling ordinances, while promoting certain bicycle functions and curbing others. Even though some bicycle-related ordinances, like those banning racing-style handlebars, targeted merely one segment of the cycling population, cyclists, as a whole, resented any government interference except, of course, those regulations that benefited cyclists and promoted cycling. As a result, many logical proposals, including requiring bicycles to have brakes, often failed to become law.¹⁰⁸ Lumping together all cyclists for purposes of regulation had its rewards for the riders, but also its perils. The speeding scorchers, albeit a minority, eventually became the symbol for the worst that cycling had to offer the city.

While city ordinances regulating bicycle use often contained a few central elements, municipal governments varied in how they crafted and applied the law. The astonishing number

¹⁰⁶ Dale A. Somers, “A City on Wheels: The Bicycle Era in New Orleans” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 8, no. 3 (Summer 1967): 228; *Proceedings of the City Council of the City of Chicago for the Municipal Year 1896* (Chicago: John F. Higgins, 1896), 1591.

¹⁰⁷ *Proceedings of the Board of Aldermen of the City of New York from January 7 to March 21, 1896* (New York: Martin B. Brown, 1897), 348.

¹⁰⁸ In New York, for example, the Board of Aldermen considered an ordinance that would have required all riders to equip their machines with a brake. Letters, like the one from the Liberty Athletic Club of New York which claimed that “the brake is utterly unnecessary,” poured in. Ultimately, laws requiring brakes were rarely passed. *Proceedings of the Board of Aldermen of the City of New York from January 7 to March 21, 1896*, 185, 201, 348-350, 444.

of city ordinances and the disparity of rules between cities frustrated many riders who asked for a more universal approach. Without such uniformity, cyclists and cycling organizations often developed an unofficial code to ensure safe and efficient movement. In particular, cyclists relied on warning bells to negotiate urban space. As the *Boston Herald* reported, the system was quite convoluted: “When approaching two people from the rear, three rings, ‘I will pass between you.’ When approaching from opposite direction, one ring, ‘I will pass to the right.’ Two rings, ‘I will pass to the left.’ ... ‘I want to talk to you’ is conveyed by some riders by three long bells.”¹⁰⁹ Even though some of these signals may have been common knowledge, many were not. Thus, city officials across the country enacted ordinances like the one passed in New York in 1897. The wave of regulations came so fast, were applied so unevenly in different cities, and covered so many different facets of bicycle riding that the subject lent itself to great parody. One critic suggested that it would not be long before heavy breathing induced by a long ride “can only be indulged in by special permit from the police department,” that “all bicycles shall be equipped with a bass drum, cymbals, gongs and a steam whistle during the day, and at night, must fire rockets and burn red, white and black fire continuously,” and that “illuminated signs must be carried, with the inscription: ‘this is a bicycle; don’t let it run you over.’”¹¹⁰

By the mid 1890s, no visitor to a major American city could spend a weekend without noticing the bicycle’s presence. All along the roads, in the parks, and across the bridges, cyclists cruised through the city. No longer relegated to certain areas, bicycles merged with the other forms of urban transportation, subjected to the same traffic regulations. After more than a

¹⁰⁹ “Up-To-Date Wheelmen,” *Boston Herald*, August 30, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York; see also “A Code of Signals,” *Buffalo Enquirer*, June 5, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Club, New-York Historical Society, New York.

¹¹⁰ “The Power of the Wheel,” *New York Journal*, June 19, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

decade of legal battles and public protests, cyclists had gained access to the city, but the nature of that access was continually redefined.

Bicycle Paths

In addition to the paved roads, asphalt strips, new traffic laws, and bicycle-only lanes, the popularization of cycling in the 1890s fostered the creation of separate bicycle roads. Bicycle paths, previously unknown in the United States and most, if not all, of the world, would forever change the landscape of the city and the bicycle's place within it. The then radical notion of creating separate roadways for bicycles signified the bicycle's growing footprint on the city map, but also hinted at some fundamental and long-lasting problems of trying to incorporate—or in this case segregate—bicycles and general city traffic.

The bicycle path movement emerged in the context of a turning point in urban transportation. With city streets carrying a diverse group of vehicles and with urban populations growing exponentially, municipal governments reconceived how traffic should flow, often resulting in the separation of traffic. By the middle of the nineteenth century, sidewalks, to facilitate urban pedestrianism, had become commonplace. And by the late nineteenth century, cities experimented with one-way boulevards, regulations designed to isolate heavy and light traffic, and trains above or below, instead of on, the street. Bicycle paths represented another way to restructure traffic. In some cities, bicycle paths came before comprehensive traffic regulation and in others the paths preceded legislation that regulated bicycle traffic on the roads. Either way, cyclists and municipal governments considered the pathways but one element of the larger schemes to regulate and accommodate the sudden increase in bicycle traffic.

Most of the pathways ran between sidewalks and the main road, but some cities laid paths in the center of the roadway or in what may have been a grassy strip between two boulevards. In different cities, the paths had different functions. In dense, urban centers bicycle paths often served to minimize traffic and offered an alternative and safer thoroughfare. Accidents involving bicycles and wagons, pedestrians, and other bicycles had become all too common.¹¹¹ In poorly paved cities, bicycle paths might serve as the only passable way between two points of interest. In yet other uses, when not designed to alleviate traffic or lessen commuting times, the pathways performed the role of an expressway to escape the city center with an enticing natural landmark (a lake, a beach, a mountaintop vista, etc.) as its final destination.

The country's first significant bicycle path, the Coney Island Cycle Path in New York, epitomized the development of bicycle path construction and of how cities came to accommodate their cyclists.¹¹² As the *New York Times* reported in 1894, when the plans for the path were finalized, "Brooklyn will probably have the first long stretch of wheelway ever built for the exclusive use of cyclists...Its natural advantages should make it the most attractive path in the world." Indeed, the five-and-one-half-mile roadway stretching from Brooklyn's Prospect Park to Coney Island provided a majestic "straight run to the sea." The existing Ocean Parkway, which paralleled the planned path, suffered from spotty paving and catered to heavier vehicles.

¹¹¹ For example, the proposal to erect a bicycle path on the Brooklyn Bridge emanated from the fact that almost three accidents involving bicycles and other vehicles occurred daily on the bridge. "Bridge Bicycle Accidents," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, June 14, 1897.

¹¹² The early history of bicycle paths remains nebulous, but for sure, New York was among the first group of cities to implement the pathways. Roughly around the same time, other cities considered similar proposals. As early as 1893 in San Francisco for example, plans for an exclusive bicycle pathway "extending to the beach" and later billed as the first "bicycle path for the exclusive use of wheelmen" emerged, but took several years to be completed. *San Francisco Municipal Reports for the Fiscal Year 1892-1893* (San Francisco: James H. Barry, 1893), 604-605; *San Francisco Municipal Reports for the Fiscal Year 1896-1897* (San Francisco: The Hinton Printing Company, 1897), 168-169. I also found an occasional reference to bicycle paths predating the Coney Island Cycle Path, but these paths were generally very short, located outside of heavily urban areas, or for an array of vehicles despite being primarily designed for cyclists. It should be noted that the pathways were sometimes referred to as sidepaths.

For the exclusive use of wheelmen, the new tree-shaded path connected two of Brooklyn's most prized treasures: its greatest park and the most famous seaside resort in the country.¹¹³

The cyclists, desperate for what was heralded as America's first bicycle path, not only lobbied for the path's construction, but also helped to pay for it. At a meeting in which a Superintendent of the Parks expressed concerns about the estimated \$1,000 per mile cost to lay the compacted gravel path, a group of leading cyclists huddled together and answered the call with a pledge to raise \$3,500 for the paths' construction. The wheelmen then launched a frenzied campaign soliciting support throughout Brooklyn. With fundraising theater parties, and through the patronage of cycling clubs, newspapers, and individual donors, the Coney Island Cycle Path Fund swelled well past its original three-and-a-half thousand dollar goal. Quickly, the construction work commenced, and on a glorious Saturday afternoon in June, 1895 an estimated twenty to thirty thousand cyclists wheeled their way across the country's newest attraction. The path enjoyed such an initial popularity that cyclists and city officials immediately began planning more paths in and around the city. Complaints about the dangers of riding over the Brooklyn Bridge led to a proposal for a separate bicycle path over the East River and the New York Legislature seriously considered paving a forty mile bicycle route that would have hugged the old Croton aqueduct, from Croton Lake to the edges of Northern Manhattan. While some of these grand ideas never materialized, bicycle paths would continue to be built and remain a constant fixture of urban life.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ "A Straight Run to the Sea," *New York Times*, August 26, 1894.

¹¹⁴ "A Straight Run to the Sea," *New York Times*, August 26, 1894; "For the Cycle Path Fund," *New York Times*, November 29, 1894; "Brooklyn's Big Bicycle Parade," *Harper's Weekly*, June 29, 1895, 604-607; "Gossip of the Cyclers," *New York Times*, May 28, 1899; "For Better Highways," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 2, 1895.



Figure 2.11: The Coney Island Cycle Path and Ocean Parkway, c.a. 1894 before the path was complete. Source: *Thirty-Fourth Annual Report of the Department of Parks of the City of Brooklyn* (1893), 9.



Figure 2.12: The bicycle-only Riverside Drive in New York, 1898. After the success of the Coney Island Cycle Path in Brooklyn, Manhattan joined the movement by creating a path along Riverside Drive. Source: Mid-Manhattan Picture Collection, New York City -- life -- 1800s, New York Public Library. Originally published in *Munsey's Magazine*, 1898.

Other cities soon followed suit. By the late 1890s, Seattle's twelve miles of winding bicycle paths made it one of the premier cycling cities, so much so that a group of city engineers from Oakland, when contemplating the future of the bicycle in its city, studied Seattle's efforts. In a letter to the Street Superintendent of Oakland, a city engineer in Seattle described how it was that so many picturesque paths had been built. The answer: "private enterprise." One of Seattle's most prominent cycling organizations, the Queen City Good Roads Club, funded the majority of the construction with the remaining portion coming from the license fee levied on all the city's cyclists. The license fee, or bicycle tax, required all riders to register their vehicles and secure a license before accessing the paths. After covering the cost of license tags (to be conspicuously attached to the bicycle's front fork) and registration, all of the remaining money from the bicycle tax was earmarked for the paths. The cyclists themselves proposed the \$1 per year tax for this specific purpose.¹¹⁵ Local cyclists in St. Paul and Minneapolis also spearheaded a successful movement to lay bicycle paths in, around, and between the Twin Cities. With little support from the municipal government, individual riders funded the majority of the seventeen miles of pathway that extended outward from the heart of St. Paul. The network of paths reached the boundary of Minneapolis, where that city's riders had laid their own bicycle path, thus creating an inter-city network.¹¹⁶

While most of the paths served intra-city travel, with a few connecting nearby cities, some plans called for a more regional approach to bicycle path planning. One such proposal would have connected Baltimore with Washington, D.C via a forty mile long bicycle highway. The toll road backed by private money never materialized. Another project sought to link Chicago and

¹¹⁵ "Build Bicycle Paths," *San Francisco Call*, August 4, 1897; *Compiled Ordinances of the City of St. Paul, Minnesota. Corrected and Revised to January 1, 1906.*

¹¹⁶ "Bicycle Paths," *Pioneer Press* (St. Paul, Minnesota), October 4, 1896 in *Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs*, New-York Historical Society, New York.

Minneapolis with a 530 mile path, while yet another proposal included designs of a Manhattan to Ohio (via Buffalo) bicycle route. Even bolder proponents of bicycle paths championed a transcontinental bicycle road connecting San Francisco and New York.¹¹⁷ These visionaries planned well out into the future, selecting their routes based on population growth rates and modeling their profits based on the ever-increasing populace of cyclists. What they could not foresee was that cycling was soon to fall out of favor and so would their ideas.

Advocates of these regional paths participated in an early form of regional planning at a time when such comprehensive schemes were few and far between. To facilitate tourism between cities and to accommodate adventurous cyclists, these bicycle superpaths promised speedier and safer travel; in some cases they simply made possible traveling within a network of cities. Local organizations would be responsible for building paths extending outward from their city center until connecting with a sister city's path. On a magnified scale, cyclists and city engineers dreamt of a national bicycle path system (similar to the national highway system inaugurated in the 1950s) with crisscrossing paths enabling any cyclist, with the necessary time and endurance (and will), access to any major city in the country. In what was likely the world's first bicycle path convention,¹¹⁸ local groups from various cities sent representatives to Rochester, New York to plan for such a network.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ *Baltimore News*, October 13, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York; James Barton, "From the Pacific to the Atlantic on a Bicycle," *State Journal* (Columbus, Ohio), June 7, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York; "Move for a Bicycle Path," *San Francisco Call*, August 18, 1895; Robert Bruce, "Bicycle Side-Path Building in 1900," *Outing*, May 1900, 182.

¹¹⁸ There were, however, some interest and some actual bicycle paths paved in cities outside of the U.S. in the 1890s. In Europe, select cities laid roadways exclusively for cyclists. But as the case of Germany illustrates, large scale construction of cycling paths was years away. It was not until automobile sales skyrocketed in the 1920s that the need to segregate traffic received support from the state. Even though in the last years of the 1920s cyclists in Germany numbered around 12 million and the number motorists amounted to less than a million, an ordinance to improve the circulation of motor vehicles ultimately required German cyclists to use cycling paths and stay off the roads when available. But in the 1890s, as Americans increasingly sought to isolate bicycle traffic from carriage traffic, most Germans were content to see their roads populated with an assortment of vehicles traveling at various speeds. In the few cases in which German cyclists clamored for separate roadways it was often because the roads

Perhaps the grandest of all bicycle path plans originated in Southern California with the proposal of an elevated bicycle roadway. Anchored by Pasadena and Los Angeles, the nine miles of planked Oregon pine wood promised the tens of thousands of urban cyclists who lived in these two cities an easy escape to the country or a fast commute to their neighboring city. Although the originator of the elevated bicycle path idea, Horace Dobbins, a millionaire and cycling enthusiast, originally found little support for his implausible pet project, the pace with which Californians adopted the bicycle convinced state legislators that inter-urban traffic, as much as intra-urban traffic, demanded a more modern approach to planning. With estimates that Pasadena and Los Angeles would together house 100,000 cyclists in just a few years, a California state senator in 1897 acknowledged that “locomotion by bicycle is getting to be so general that it seems some provision must be made for the people who resort to it, and who are becoming more and more numerous.” Consequently, he warned that the state needed to think proactively and “look forward to the time when we must prepare all our public roads and streets for the use of bicycles.” In the interim, he supported the construction of the elevated path and championed a bill that allowed the California Cycle-Way to acquire property through eminent domain. Promoters of the Cycle-Way boasted that the first elevated bicycle path on Earth would

were poorly paved and designed for heavy vehicles. In general, though, European cities built and maintained roads that put American cities to shame, which in some ways rendered separate bicycle paths less necessary and, for some good roads advocates, illuminated the futility of bicycle paths. Outside of Europe, Australians and New Zealanders laid paths in some of their urban districts, but as one observer noted “the cycle path is first and last an American institution.” Whether that was a source of pride or embarrassment depended on the rider. Volker Briese, “Bicycle Path Construction in Germany, 1897-1940,” in Rob van der Plas, ed., *Cycle History: Proceedings of the 5th International Cycle History Conference, Cambridge, England, September 2-4, 1994* (San Francisco: Bicycle Books, 1995); “Side Paths,” *L.A.W. Bulletin and Good Roads Magazine*, July 10, 1895, 51; Bruce, “Bicycle Side-Path Building in 1900,” 182.

¹¹⁹ Robert Bruce, “Bicycle Side-Path Building in 1900,” 182.

spur commercial intercourse and function as a paragon for other metropolises grappling with an abundance of bicycles. They were wrong.¹²⁰

On the first day of 1900, 1,000 cyclists celebrated the new century and the opening of a section of path stretching toward Los Angeles from its terminus in Pasadena by forking over the ten cent fare. Perched at its apex fifty feet above the ground, the path, supposedly “strong enough to bear a service of trolley-cars,” was built wide enough to accommodate four cyclists abreast; was illuminated by electric lights at 100 feet intervals; offered an expressway that was free of horses, dogs, and wagons; and provided unparalleled views of the scenic country sandwiched between the two cities. The Moorish-inspired terminal in Pasadena provided rental, repair, and storage services, while the Merlemont Park Casino, to be built midway and surrounded by lavish gardens, was to house cafes, reception rooms, a ladies reading room, and a Swiss dairy. This luxurious rest stop promised cyclists a bucolic respite on their journey between the two cities or simply a destination for those wishing to escape the fog of urban life.¹²¹

¹²⁰ T.D. Denham “California’s Great Cycle-Way” *Pearson’s Magazine*, September 1901, 305-307; “Unique Scheme for Wheelmen,” *San Francisco Call*, January 23, 1897. London, Paris, Berlin, and New York also considered, but never built, elevated cycling roads. “The Wheel, Present and Future,” *Journal* (Milwaukee), September 23, 1896; “Around the Park,” *New York Evening Recorder*, October 4, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

¹²¹ T.D. Denham ,“California’s Great Cycle-Way,” 305-307; “Bicycle Path for Pasadena,” *San Francisco Call*, January 31, 1898; “Cycle Way Formally Opened,” *San Francisco Call*, January 2, 1900; “A Magnificent California Enterprise,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 19, 1899. Incidentally, a proposed New York elevated bicycle path was also to house resting stations designed in the “fashion of Swiss cottages.” “Around the Park,” *New York Evening Recorder*, October 4, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.



Figure 2.13: A portion of the California Cycle-Way in 1901. Source: “California’s Great Cycle-Way,” *Pearson’s Magazine*, September 1901, 305.

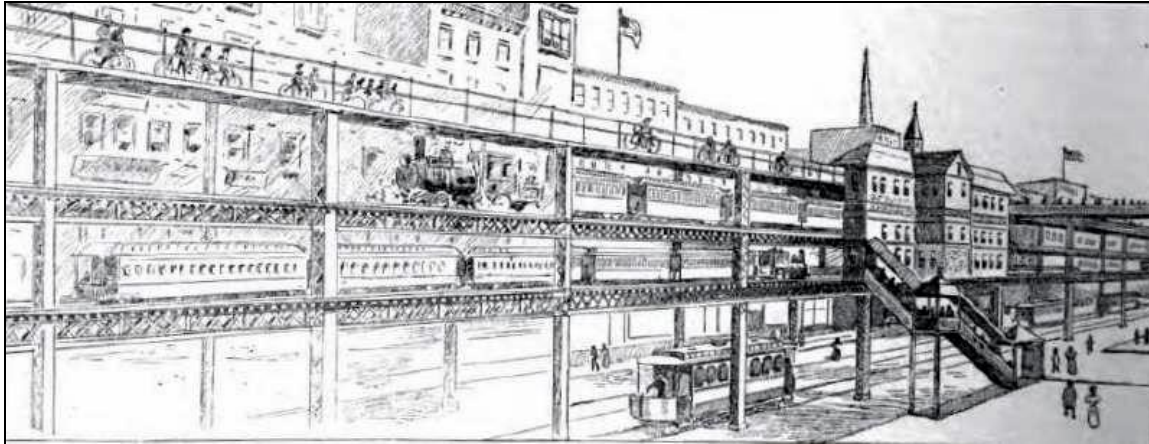


Figure 2.14: Unlike the California Cycle-Way, which sought to connect two urban centers, in New York, as in many other cities, the idea of an elevated bicycle path garnered serious discussions and proposals, but was never built. In New York, the blueprint called for streetcars on the ground level, elevated railroads above, and a bicycle-only path on the very top. Source: *Review of Reviews*, June 1896, 648.

Even though the path enjoyed an initial popularity, Dobbins, the head of the California Cycle-Way Co., began floating alternative, and more lucrative, uses for the right of way connecting Pasadena to Los Angeles. Within a few short years it became obvious that the

pathway would never be completely finished. Railroad company executives, concerned about losing their traffic to the Cycle-Way, brokered a deal with Dobbins, which killed the innovative project that had once been dubbed a certain success. By 1907, with the speedway remaining only half-built, a campaign to raze the existing portion commenced. In language signaling that the cycling craze had died even faster than it began, the Pasadena City Council announced that the unpleasant “old landmark” would be removed.¹²²

While the California Cycle-Way never fully materialized, many bicycle paths did. Ironically, however, the creation of well-paved bicycle paths may have ultimately been one cause of the bicycle’s demise as a legitimate urban vehicle. From the earliest days of the bicycle craze, cyclists had fought for the right to use the street. Once successful, cyclists joined the omnibuses and the trolley car in transforming urban streets. Aside from transportation, the streets had functioned as open-air markets, as places for pushcarts, as meeting places, as walking paths for pedestrians, and as front yards in which to enjoy precious urban commodities: light and air. But by the end of the nineteenth century, city traffic, exacerbated by bicycles, put an end to the everyday street carnivals. The previously multi-functional street had become more one dimensional, serving primarily as an artery for transportation.¹²³

With the redefinition of the street, cyclists recognized the need to be classed as a legitimate vehicle. Around the country, cyclists succeeded and secured their right to the road. But the issue of bicycle paths created a double-edged sword that endangered the future of urban cycling. On one hand, smooth pathways isolated from city traffic provided a safe and easy way to move about the city. Yet, as some farsighted cyclists realized, the proliferation of cycling paths

¹²² “Los Angeles County: Cities and Suburban Places,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 25, 1902; “Ask Permission to Remove Old Landmark,” *Los Angeles Herald*, October 23, 1907.

¹²³ McShane, *Down the Asphalt Path*, 62.

threatened the bicycle's legitimacy. The contrasting views erupted in an 1896 battle over Brooklyn's Ocean Parkway and the adjacent Coney Island Cycle Path.¹²⁴

Brooklyn's Park Commissioner Timothy Woodruff expected a warm welcome from the city's wheelmen. After all, he had proposed adding to and improving the splendid path that brought Coney Island within easy reach of the city's riders. In less than a year after its completion, the greatest bicycle path in the world proved inadequate. With the original path well-worn by a regular "human panorama" of riders, the initial expectation that the path would last at least a decade dimmed.¹²⁵ To alleviate congestion on the path (one traffic count showed 32,000 riders used the path on a single day and contemporary accounts often estimated that between 25,000 and 30,000 riders regularly used the path¹²⁶), Woodruff agreed to pave a "return path," which promised cyclists two separate one-way paths to and from the shore. But his other proposal, which stipulated that cyclists ride exclusively on the bordering pathway and not on the adjacent parkway, met a mixed reaction. The bicycle path had been lauded as the Brooklyn cyclists' greatest asset and the vast majority of riders used the pathway instead of the crowded street anyway. However, a few cyclists looked past the promise of new macadam. A senior member of the L.A.W. denounced the ordinance as illegal and "absurd" and the L.A.W.'s Rights and Privileges Committee put out an official statement lambasting Woodruff for setting "a bad precedent," by violating "the plain intent and meaning of the Liberty bill, which is the greatest

¹²⁴ Aside from the earning the "right to the road," cycling advocates went to great lengths to ensure the bicycle's status as a legitimate urban vehicle and to class the bicycle alongside other primary modes of transportation. For example, in 1895 an Act introduced in Albany would have required that bicycles carry lanterns at night. Objecting to the edict, Potter of the L.A.W. did not protest that bicycle's should not carry lanterns, but rather that if bicycles are to be subjected to the requirement then all other vehicles, principally horse-drawn carriages, should be forced to comply. "Gossip of the Cyclers," *New York Times*, February, 11, 1895.

¹²⁵ "Another cycle path," *New York Commercial Advertiser*, June 27, 1896; "Cycling Notes," *Evening World* (New York), June 16, 1896. The "return path" opened on June 27, 1896 just over one year after the original Coney Island Cycle Path opened.

¹²⁶ "Summary of Events," *The Friend: A Religious and Literary Journal*, June 6, 1896, 308; "On the Wheel," *Standard Union* (Brooklyn), July 20, 1896, in *Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs*, New-York Historical Society, New York.

safeguard of the wheelmen.” According to that bill, the L.A.W. reminded Woodruff, no local authority could exclude cyclists from any roadway in the state.

Similar debates arose in San Francisco as the Golden Gate Park Commissioners authorized the construction of bicycle paths simultaneous to issuing a mandate that riders use only the paths and avoid the main drives. The local L.A.W. division in San Francisco followed their Brooklyn brethren in protest on the grounds that as a vehicle, defined in the same manner as a carriage, bicycles could not be prohibited from the streets.¹²⁷ In Cleveland, too, cyclists lobbied against a new bicycle path that would have rendered an adjacent mixed-use Boulevard a bicycle-prohibited roadway.¹²⁸ But back in Brooklyn, Commissioner Woodruff rebutted by arguing that the two bicycle paths adjacent to the road, sixteen and eighteen feet wide respectively, were mere extensions of the roadway. As such, Woodruff maintained that he was simply separating traffic with lighter vehicles relegated to the far right (the paths).¹²⁹ Considering that a row of trees and a bed of grass separated the pathway from the main boulevard, the Park Commissioner’s logic defied common sense.

Most critically, the Ocean Parkway/Coney Island Cycle Path debate began to splinter the once unified political coalition of wheelmen. Most cyclists supported the path, and the prospect of more wide, paved pathways exclusively for their use was certainly attractive. Some, including members of the L.A.W., were so appreciative that they not only supported the measure, but also agreed to serve as part of a special cycling police corps, charged with enforcing the new ordinance. But selective opposition did reverberate inside the Litchfield Mansion where

¹²⁷ “Cycling in the Park,” *San Francisco Call*, July 13, 1896, in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

¹²⁸ *Third Annual Report of the Board of Park Commissioners of the City of Cleveland 1895* (Cleveland: 1896).

¹²⁹ “Potter Says He Will Fight,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 7, 1896; “Bassett’s Big Figures” *New York Evening World*, June 24, 1896; “News of the Wheelmen,” *New York Sun*, June 17, 1896; “Cycling in the Park,” *San Francisco Call*, July 13, 1896, in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

Commissioner Woodruff later swore in the rookie, mounted policemen. Alex Schwalbach, an outspoken doyen of the wheelman, denounced the ordinance as illegal. In a confrontation with the Parks Commissioner, Schwalbach praised the bicycle path but emphasized that cyclists had a right to the highway, regardless of whether any paths existed. In a testy battle of words, the Commissioner insinuated that the bicycle path improvements might be called off if wheelmen persisted to protest the ban on parkway riding. With the crowd screaming “No, no,” Schwalbach further distressed his comrades when he declared that “wheelmen have a right to the main driveway and we will have the privilege of going there even if we have to give up the cycle path.” For Schwalbach, the issue was not about comfort or safety; rather, it was about legitimacy. The bicycle, he contended, had a right to the road and any attempts to separate bicycle traffic, even those ordinances packaged as pro-cycling, endangered the bicycle’s future.¹³⁰

The Good Roads Association, of which Schwalbach was the first vice president, took immediate action to distance itself from its renegade leader. Its members decided to relocate their upcoming executive meeting so that the group would no longer convene at Schwalbach’s popular riding academy. The organization, which counted Brooklyn’s mayor, comptroller, and commissioner of public works as members, effectively boycotted one of its leading members in what the cycling community saw as a clear “slap” at the man who jeopardized the glorious pathway.¹³¹ In addition, the Good Roads Association President, Albert Angell, publicly diverged from Schwalbach and backed the Brooklyn Parks Commissioner’s decision to bar bicycles from the main drive. As he saw it:

¹³⁰ “Potter Says He Will Fight,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 7, 1896; “Special Park Police,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 9, 1896.

¹³¹ “Cycling Clubs and their Spheres of Action,” *Outing*, August 1897, 490; “Ocean Parkway Ordinance,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 15, 1896.

There is no city in the Union where the wheelmen have obtained so much from the local authorities, and there is no road in the country where there are such excellent accommodations for wheelmen as on the Ocean Parkway. If he has the right to give us the exclusive use of the cycle paths, he has the right to give other pleasure vehicles the exclusive use of the main driveway. If one is illegal, both are, and I doubt if the wheelmen generally will approve the action of any one who attacks the legality of the cycle paths, and that's just what it amounts to.¹³²

Despite the support of the Good Roads Association, opposition to the Woodruff proposal, which included members of some of cycling's most prominent organizations, intensified. The Committee on Streets and Highways of the L.A.W.'s New York Division warned that granting exclusive rights to a road (or path) was something that it had fought hard against and, on ideological grounds, refused to support.¹³³ Isaac Potter, then officer and future president of the L.A.W. who had once authored a lengthy treatise on the mechanics of planning, building, and maintaining bicycle paths, now became one of the path's most tireless opponents.¹³⁴ In the end, despite the selected opposition, Commissioner Woodruff enacted a comprehensive set of eighteen ordinances regulating vehicular traffic in Prospect Park and on the Coney Island Cycle Path. Rule Number Eight dictated that cyclists use the bicycle path exclusively. Riding on the parkway was cause for arrest.

The bulk of local cyclists welcomed the new path, along with the 108 linear feet of bicycle racks, 460 linear feet of benches, shelters and bathrooms, shaded rendezvous points, and water fountains all built just for them. Wheelmen and wheelwomen could enjoy the Flower Garden Shelter by parking their machines anywhere along the abutting thirty-foot bicycle rack. In the summer, riders visiting the music pavilion could valet their wheels, and in the winter, park

¹³² "News of the Wheelmen," *New York Sun*, June 10, 1896.

¹³³ "News of the Wheelmen," *New York Sun*, June 10, 1896.

¹³⁴ "News of the Wheelmen," *New York Sun*, June 10, 1896. Even though Potter had championed Cycle Paths before, he did so reluctantly and only "as a valued auxiliary to the greater cause" of good roads. Potter, *Cycle Paths*, 8.

officials enclosed one of the open-air cycling shelters to provide a cozy respite from the cold.¹³⁵ No matter the season, adjacent road houses and taverns offered cyclists food, drink, and a boy to look after their wheels.¹³⁶ In fact, so many riders enjoyed the path that tens of thousands of local wheelmen participated in a parade thanking the Commissioner, who was then tapped as the Republican candidate for Lieutenant Governor (he would serve three terms in this role, including under Theodore Roosevelt), for his work on behalf of cyclists.



Figure 2.15: “The Bicycle Path from Prospect Park, Brooklyn to Coney Island.” Source: *Munsey’s Magazine*, May 1896, 141.

With the total spectators numbering upwards of 100,000, the *New York Journal*, in its usual hyperbolic tone, reported that “all the wheelmen in Brooklyn, or nearly all, passed in review before him and cheered him until those who loved him doubted that they had ever done him full

¹³⁵ *Thirty-Seventh Annual Report of the Department of Parks of the City of Brooklyn the Third of the County of Kings and the First to the Mayor of the Greater New York for the Year 1897* (Brooklyn: 1897), 168; *Thirty-Sixth Annual Report of the Department of Parks of the City of Brooklyn the Second of the County of Kings for the Year 1896* (Brooklyn: 1896), 11, 180-181; *Thirty-Fifth Annual Report of the Department of Parks of the City of Brooklyn for the Year 1895* (Brooklyn: 1895), 26, 107.

¹³⁶ “Routes to Coney Island,” *New York Times*, April 28, 1895.

justice.”¹³⁷ Quite simply, the splendor of the paths overshadowed the ban on parkway riding.

Back in Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, where the ordinance requiring riders to use the paths in lieu of the main drives failed to become law, almost all of the riders had used the bicycle-only paths by choice.¹³⁸

Throughout the late 1890s, urban cyclists continued to rally for additional paths. Cyclists, through collective action, carved out these smooth pathways for both leisure and practical travel. Many of the cyclists relished in their accomplishments and the city’s accommodation of their wheels. Voices of protest, including those from within the L.A.W., which by 1900 devoted considerable resources toward the “side-path movement,” quietly ebbed. From 1895, when the Coney Island Cycle Path opened, to the turn of the century, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Rochester, Seattle, Minneapolis, St. Paul, St. Louis, and nearly every other city of considerable size built many miles of bicycle paths. When city engineers in Toledo, Ohio, designed a municipal boulevard system, bicycle paths ran alongside all of the main thoroughfares just as they did in Buffalo, New York.¹³⁹ To accommodate the growing population of urban cyclists, cities engaged in bicycle-friendly urban planning in an age when terms like “greenways” and “eco-friendly” were still decades away and at a time when the word “green” almost always referred to just a color. But they did so at a great cost. The long campaign to promote bicycles as legitimate urban vehicles, warranting the same rights and status as others, suddenly took a large step backwards.

¹³⁷ “Information for Cyclists,” *New York Evening Sun*, June 29, 1896; “Night Parade of Brooklyn Cyclists,” *New York Journal*, September 27, 1896.

¹³⁸ “The Wheelmen,” *San Francisco Call*, January 25, 1896.

¹³⁹ Bruce, “Bicycle Side-Path Building in 1900,” 183; Charles Zueblin, *American Municipal Progress: Chapters in Municipal Sociology* (New York: The MacMillan Company New York, 1902), 252.

Conclusion

At the dawn of the nineteenth century it was a motley collection of engineers, politicians, reformers, businessmen, and laypeople that planned and reshaped America's cities. Modern urban planning was a twentieth century invention. By all accounts, there were no professional planners. There were no trade journals. No one held a professional degree in urban planning.¹⁴⁰ Consequently, with a hodgepodge of competing interests and urban infrastructure developing in piecemeal fashion, particular interest-groups, including urban cyclists, often exerted disproportionate influence over a singular set of planning concerns. Urban power brokers, representing a wide range of interests, wrestled for control in city after city.

Perhaps the truest picture of the distribution of power rests in the historical city itself. By examining its concrete elements, evidence abounds about its builders. As Mona Domosh has argued, "if the city can be thought of as a work of art...then it can also be read as both a product, a creation of individuals living in a particular time period and place, and as a commentary on that time and place."¹⁴¹ Thus, the landscape of the late nineteenth century American city provides a historical canvas that can reveal its context. The newly paved roads and boulevards, the small strips of asphalt laid for cyclists, the bicycle-only pathways, and the rewritten traffic laws represented only the most tangible monuments of the cyclists' efforts. Responsible for these physical changes, urban cyclists, with populations numbering the tens of thousands in many

¹⁴⁰ M. Christine Boyer, *Dreaming the Rational City: The Myth of American City Planning* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983), xi. Nonetheless, as John Fairfield has argued cities were, in certain ways, "planned" even in this pre-planning era. Politicians and individuals consciously debated and implemented far-reaching policies affecting city building far into the future. But the contemporary debates revealed that "city building should remain an essentially individual process in which the average citizen," which would certainly include cyclists, "had a crucial and largely private role to play." John D. Fairfield, *The Mysteries of the Great City: The Politics of Urban Design 1877-1937* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993), 3-7.

¹⁴¹ Mona Domosh, *Invented Cities: The Creation of Landscape in Nineteenth-Century New York & Boston* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 3.

cities and the hundreds of thousands in the largest cities, with strong organizational support and leadership, with a powerful political lobby, and with the pluck to protest, parade, and boycott, altered the city. Without professional urban planners, individual riders, cycling entrepreneurs, and cycling clubs coalesced into a powerful special-interest group that helped transform the design of American cities and in the process crafted, on a comprehensive scale, what we would today describe as a “bicycle-friendly city.” These visionaries had only begun, or so they thought, to reconceive the city along these lines. Their vision of the future city, shared by a legion of enthusiasts, everyday riders, lawmakers, and engineers, was nothing short of utopian. And the bicycle’s role in that dream city, now lost in history, was nothing short of fundamental.

Chapter 3

Living in the Cycling City

In the 1890s, the American city was a promised land. Millions flocked to urban centers, leaving Europe, the Jim Crow South, and the American countryside in their dust for a world (supposedly) filled with jobs, absent of discrimination, endowed with cultural capital, and infused with vitality. In the final three decades of the nineteenth century alone, the urban population living within the ten largest U.S. cities doubled.¹

Upon arrival, however, urban transplants often found the promised land to be something far short of a fairy tale. Cities stank and rang with noise. Ugly buildings sat sandwiched between fouled streets and polluted skies. People squashed into tenements, neighborhoods, and entire cities, even as urban sprawl and metropolitan consolidation pushed municipal boundaries farther and farther away from the urban nucleus. Urban life offered the best and worst of humanity. Millions of inhabitants living and working in an area circumscribed by mere miles created a culture that promoted efficiencies of economy and capital, enhanced social opportunities, and fostered ingenuity, as easily as it invited vice and pollution.

Instead of simply condemning cities, urban reformers and individual city dwellers launched a movement to make their cities more livable. To do so, they turned to modern technology. Reformers and visionaries celebrated science and machines, innovation and modernization, with a new fervor.² Urban life would never be the same. Among other things, they imagined cities

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, *Twelfth Census of the United States: Statistics of Population* [1900], vol. I, pt. I (Washington, D.C., 1901), 430-436.

² Stanley K. Schultz, *Constructing Urban Culture: American Cities and City Planning, 1800-1920* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), xvii.

that were smaller, healthier, and more modern. And to cast their utopian blueprint into reality no invention, they believed, would prove more important than the bicycle.

The Shrunken City and Urban Mobility

All spaces change over time. Even those spaces that experience few natural changes are imbued with different meanings in different contexts. For example, from the day fireworks announced the opening of the Brooklyn Bridge, New York's East River was forever changed. Although the water was no cleaner or deeper than it was the day before, the Gothic towers that anchored the then-longest suspension bridge miraculously turned an obstacle into a doorway. Indeed, all urban spaces become defined not strictly by their absolute geometry, but rather by the "gestures and actions of those who inhabit" them.³ One of the most significant re-conceptualizations of space emerged as a consequence of shifting spatial-temporal dynamics. Leading philosophers, physicists, and geographers have long grappled with theories that aim to characterize the relations between time and space. The results are as varied as they are complex. But one useful tenet of relative spatial-temporal dynamics is quite simple: the annihilation of space through time. The size of a space functions inversely to the speed with which that space can be traversed. Compared to the days before aviation, the Atlantic Ocean today, with jets flying overhead from Miami to Paris, remains in absolute terms (mostly) unchanged, but conceptually the giant ocean has shrunk dramatically.⁴

³ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1991), 127. For more on the changing purposes and environment of Central Park see, Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

⁴ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 232. One early observer even noted that the power of the bicycle is that it "erases time and space." M.D. Bellencontre, *Hygiène du vélocipède* (Paris: L. Richard, Libraire-éditeur, 1869), 38 as quoted in

Over the course of history, new modes of transportation have contracted the distance between cities, subsequently revolutionizing culture and commerce. On a much smaller scale, bicycles altered the space within the city, affording greater mobility and a re-fashioned sense of the urban world. Bicycles enabled city dwellers to traverse the city like walkers, but with exceptional speed, something with which Americans were quickly becoming obsessed. The telegraph and telephone had quickened communication as the railroads destroyed distance. Newspapers reported about nautical speed records and sports columnists kept their devoted readers entranced with tales of galloping horses. Ragtime musicians pounded piano keys faster than the eye could see. On city streets, men glanced down at their pocket watches in frighteningly short intervals. Perceptions about time and space were in the midst of a great transformation. Life moved quicker. Speed was exulted. Distances asked to be overcome.⁵

Bicycles, part cause, and their popularity part an effect of the changing sensibilities, created, as one French author wrote, a “cult of speed” for those who sought “to conquer time and space.”⁶ Noting that bicycles easily outpaced trotting horses, *Harper’s Weekly* in 1895 reported that the “regular bicycle-rider’s area is extended amazingly” considering that “the same effort that is required to walk one mile will propel a bicycle six miles.”⁷ Or, as a writer from *The Arena* in 1892 put it, the bicycle was rapidly “multiplying the reach of man’s footsteps as the power-loom has multiplied the productivity of man’s hands.”⁸ Perhaps, it was best described by

Christopher Thompson, *The Tour de France: A Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 29.

⁵ Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 1-3, 110-113, 123.

⁶ Paul Adam, *La Morale des sports* (Paris, 1907), 449-450 as quoted in Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space*, 111.

⁷ “Bicycle-Riding,” *Harper’s Weekly*, January 12, 1895, 27

⁸ Sylvester Baxter, “Economic and Social Influences of the Bicycle,” *The Arena*, October 1892, 578.

a *Scribner's* columnist who in 1894 defined the bicycle as, quite simply, “an annihilator of space.”⁹ Urban mobility would never be the same.

Whether it was a wheelwoman taking an afternoon spin; a wheelman riding to work; a city cyclist exploring the neighboring countryside; or a rider cycling to the store, school, a site for recreation, or a cultural attraction, the bicycle offered an efficient door-to-door connection. Urbanites on wheels moved faster across the city than almost anything else. They discovered new parts of the city and indulged in the delights of the previously inaccessible hills, lakes, vistas, clean air, and fragrant floral bouquets that could only be found outside the city center.¹⁰ However briefly, the bicycle's mobility transformed the lives of its riders and the city as a whole. Particularly so, because Americans fell in love with its individualistic nature—the ability to go wherever and whenever one wished.

With the rise of industrialization and the industrial city came an inherent loss of independence and individualism. The number of artisans and those who worked inside their homes dwindled. Mass transit shepherded herds of city folk to crowded train cars. Institutions, as much as any individual, wielded political, economic, and social power, while bureaucracy spun its own web of impersonal relations. Great cities are, after all, communities that are sustained by the very codependence that comes naturally with urban society; yet late nineteenth-century-cities also attracted those wishing to live anonymously in the shadows of skyscrapers. Nevertheless, the American spirit of individualism has proven hard to dispel. Even as the forces of industrial life led to mega-corporations and megalopolises, independence was a prized virtue

⁹ “A Point of View,” *Scribner's Magazine*, October 1894, 527.

¹⁰ For an interesting, albeit brief, discussion on urban mobility and the city see, Robert Park, “The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behavior in the Urban Environment,” in Richard Sennett, ed., *Classic Essay on the Culture of Cities* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1969), 125-127.

among city dwellers.¹¹ It is not surprising, then, that the self-propelled bicycle, which promised access at almost any time to almost any place on the urban map, was so popular in the United States. That penchant for independence and “personal freedom” manifested itself in the astounding popularity of the bicycle and, ultimately, with an American culture that embraced the automobile to an obsessive degree. Both vehicles allowed riders to shed their dependence on overworked horses, unreliable carriage drivers, or the fixed timetables of the railways. As one journalist wrote in 1897, the cyclist was “the perfection of selfishness.”¹² He or she could wander about the city, the countryside, or anywhere in between.

Enamored by the independence and efficiency afforded by bicycles, urban riders maintained an ubiquitous presence in the 1890s city. Securely out of the realm of a mere pastime, cycling emerged as a convenient method of transportation ridden as much for its practicality as for the thrill. A reporter in 1896 described that evolution: “the bicycle, at first regarded more as a plaything, or as part of the machinery of a circus, to be used only by experts to amuse a crowd, as the trapeze, or the balloon, gradually worked its way and from a toy has come at length to be as practical for everyday use as the old fashioned horse and buggy.” Adding that the bicycle had become a “necessity of civilization,” the journalist noted its “almost universal use.”¹³ Likewise, in New Orleans a columnist declared that, with perhaps the exception of the watch, “the bicycle is, without doubt, the most popular and generally used machine in the world” as the “article of necessity...is now ridden for business, for pleasure,” and

¹¹ As the British scholar James Bryce wrote in 1888, “individualism, the love of enterprise, and the pride in personal freedom, have been deemed by Americans not only their choicest, but their peculiar and exclusive possessions.” James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth. Vol. II* (London: The MacMillan Company, 1888), 406-7.

¹² J. & E. R. Pennell, “Twenty Years of Cycling,” *The Fortnightly Review*, August 1, 1897, 191.

¹³ “Wheelmen as Soldiers,” *Hoboken Observer*, July 2, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, May 26, 1896-February 11, 1897, and undated, New-York Historical Society, New York.

for health.¹⁴ It was the bicycle's ability to shrink the city and save time that made it so appealing.

Indeed, as practical cyclists joined the many riders who rode for recreation, the total number of urban riders multiplied and city institutions commenced a new campaign to accommodate them. Churches placed bicycle racks outside their halls of worship, offered attendants to watch over congregants' wheels, and some even held special bicycle-friendly services and cycling-related sermons (e.g. "The Bicycle as a Means of Grace").¹⁵ Like churches, local businesses found themselves competing for cyclists. Both leisure riders and those commuting to and around the city required special amenities, like racks, sheds, or valets to secure their vehicles. In the earliest years of the 1890s few restaurants, hotels, or other pleasure destinations offered secure storage, but by mid-decade, it was a different story. Writing from Buffalo, a journalist indicated that "few stores or business houses are without a bicycle rack in front for their customers and a bicycle storeroom in the building for employees." "Bicycles are checked at the theatres and at the churches," he reported.¹⁶ Bicycle accommodations had become so prevalent, in fact, that some city governments sought to slow the growing number of bicycle racks swallowing city sidewalks. In San Jose, California, a city in which the local newspaper claimed that "bicycles are as numerous, if not more so, than other vehicles," a city councilman launched a campaign to limit the quantity and size of bicycle racks that seemed to be overtaking the city.¹⁷ Even the most august urban institutions appreciated that their visitors would often come by bicycle. Around the turn of the century, New York's Metropolitan

¹⁴ "The Wonderful Wheel," *New Orleans Picayune*, June 14, 1896.

¹⁵ "Bicycle Room in a Church," *L.A.W. Bulletin and Good Roads*, May 21, 1897, 611; "The Bicycle and its Triumphs," *Atlanta Journal*, June 27, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York; "The Pulpit and the Bicycle," *Arena*, August 1895.

¹⁶ "In Buffalo," *Printers' Inks*, September 6, 1899, 8.

¹⁷ "The Bicycle Racks," *Evening News* (San Jose), August 7, 1896; "Councilman Miner Swings His Ax on the Bicycle Racks About the Town," *Evening News* (San Jose), November 20, 1899.

Museum of Art, for example, built a bicycle room for its patrons.¹⁸ Whether it was the wealthy, the art-loving, or just those seeking efficiency, the prevalence of cyclists riding to businesses, schools, and places of public accommodation marked a decided shift in urban dynamics. Cyclists sped by on their way to work or to run an errand, casting a wider net on the city and enabling city institutions to vie for patrons across an increasingly expanding territory. In this sense, bicycles made the city seem smaller.



Figure 3.1: Pictured above is a group of cyclists patronizing an ice cream stand, presumably on 110th street in New York in 1896. The photograph reveals two sets of bicycle racks, one built around an existing tree and the other attached to the building itself. Hortons Ice Cream shop was but one of the many businesses that began to cater to their cycling customers. Source: Byron Company. From the Collections of the Museum of the City of New York, Byron Company.

¹⁸ *Appletons' Dictionary of New York and its Vicinity* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1902), 170.

With bicycles able to traverse such a great swath of the city in such little time, commercial interests quickly adopted the new vehicle. Urban businesses could exploit the “shrinking city” to save time and to narrow the perceived gap between customer and client. Boys on bicycles could be seen delivering almost anything. In Buffalo, oysters came by wheel.¹⁹ In Denver, ambulances, hearses, and even mobile bakeries were towed by bicycles.²⁰ All across the country doctors used bicycles “practically and profitably” to make house calls.²¹ And in 1896 the American District Telegraph began what would become an established industry practice of equipping its messenger boys with bicycles. By the turn of the century, teenage bicycle messengers dashing through the city had become a fixture of the urban environment. On a much smaller scale than the telegraph and the railroad that preceded it, bicycles contributed to the late-nineteenth-century’s communications revolution.²²

Aside from enabling a quickened communication network, bicycles also offered a unique method of patrolling the city. With the ability to maneuver as if on foot and with speeds in excess of fifteen miles per hour easily attainable, a bicycle presented its user with a distinctive opportunity to survey larger chunks of the city, not to mention the ability to hunt down criminals. Accordingly, in December of 1895, the New York police launched its first of what would become several mounted units. Ironically, the first cycling cops were charged with regulating bicycle traffic and ticketing their reckless brethren. Bicycle policemen would continue to patrol

¹⁹ Advertisement, *Printers’ Ink*, September 6, 1899, 39.

²⁰ “Bicycle in Practical Use,” *Denver Republican*, November 15, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

²¹ Charles Eadward Pratt, *What & Why: Some Common Questions Answered* (Boston: Press of Rockwell and Churchill, 1884), 62-64.

²² “Messenger Boys to Use Bicycles,” *New York Times*, May 3, 1896. For more on the early bicycle telegraph messengers see, Gregory J. Downey, *Telegraph Messenger Boys: Labor, Technology, and Geography, 1850-1950* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Ross D. Petty, “The Bicycle as a Communications Medium: A Comparison of Bicycle Use by the U.S. Postal Service and Western Union Telegraph Company,” in *Cycle History 16: Proceedings of the 16th International Cycling History Conference, University of California, September 2005* (San Francisco: Van der Plas, 2006).

New York's streets for decades to come and would become an important feature in metropolitan police departments around the country. To similarly exploit the bicycle's prowess for eyeing the city, the Salvation Army launched its own bicycling unit. Members anticipated that a mounted corps could easily "chase a flying sinner" with a "squadron of mounted Salvationists dashing through the street...firing volleys of song and sermon without ever slackening their pace."²³

But the most profound, practical, and one of the most employed functions of the machine was to commute. In this sense, while bicycles produced a conceptually smaller city for intra-city movement, in certain respects, they expanded the range of the city's reach, as workers from one part of the city rode to another and as residents from outside the city cycled their way into town. In the 1890s in general, the pace of suburbanization quickened as the impersonal forces of the industrial city led to an elevated appreciation for privacy, space, and the natural landscape. Electric streetcars and newly affordable detached homes also encouraged a move to the suburbs.²⁴ Living outside the city, just a short commute from urban amenities, was an attractive proposition for many late-nineteenth-century Americans. Having a bicycle unlocked the best of both worlds. As one editorialist described, a bicycle can "carry those who work in the city out to the suburbs, where they own or rent detached houses amid pleasant scenes and pure air, enjoying thus the beauty and quiet of the country together with the advantages of the city."²⁵ The democratization of bicycles, albeit on an extremely small scale, contributed to suburbanization and the elevation of the suburban ideal.

²³ "Police Patrol Awheel," *New York Times*, December 13, 1895; "Mounted Salvationists," *New York Times*, June 5, 1884.

²⁴ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 45-48, 111, 124.

²⁵ George Harris, "Supplementary Educational Agencies," *Educational Review*, February, 1902, 122.

Even as early as the late 1860s, *Scientific American* cited “one gentleman in the country who does business in the city” who had replaced his horse and wagon with a bicycle.²⁶ Certainly, this had been an oddity, but by the mid-1890s bicycle commuting was far from uncommon. In 1895, a reporter observed, “Already in every village and town the mechanic and factory hand goes to his work on his wheel. Thanks to this modern wonder,” he added, “they can live several miles away from their work, thus getting cheaper rents and better surroundings for their children; they can save car-fares and get healthful exercise.”²⁷ Unlike other forms of transportation, the bicycle gave workers a practical door-to-door vehicle. Only horses had the ability to equal the bicycle as a mode of private transportation. But even those wealthy enough to purchase, house, and feed a horse could never reasonably expect to ride to work. Bicycles, on the other hand, could be stored inside or out, in one’s home and at one’s place of work. Wheel racks and bicycle holders lined the city; riders could be seen carrying their folding bicycles up a flight of stairs before storing them in a corner, on the back of a door, or in a neatly designed piece of furniture.²⁸ (figure 3.2) Weather was surely a factor for some riders, but bicycle capes, jackets, and hats helped shield riders from the elements. Commuters, dressed more like businessmen than cyclists, toted their briefcases or parcels via any number of bicycle attachments, sported cycling accessories like “trouser guards” to protect their work clothes, rode a comfortable pace—but still fast enough to beat public transportation options—and regularly traversed distances more than ten miles.²⁹

²⁶ “The Velocipede Mania,” *Scientific American*, December 23, 1868, 407.

²⁷ Phillip Hubert, Jr., “The Bicycle: The Wheel of To-Day,” *Scribner’s Magazine*, June 1895, 693, 697.

²⁸ Marmaduke Humphres, “A Cycle Show in Little,” *Godey’s Magazine*, April 1896, 367; “A Folding Bicycle,” *Bicycling World*, September 27, 1895, 771; “Practical Bicycle Holder,” *American Wheelman*, July 9, 1896, 19; Marie E. Ward, *The Common Sense of Bicycling: Bicycling for Ladies* (New York: Brentano’s, 1896), 139.

²⁹ “Where Wheel Men Abound,” *New York Herald*, September 16, 1894; A.G. Spalding & Bros. *Makers of Credends Bicycles and Cycling Sundries Catalog* (1890).



Figure 3.2: A folding bicycle neatly hanging on a coat/hat rack. Source: *Godey's Magazine*, April 1896, 370.

Although it is impossible to determine the exact number of cyclists commuting within, and to, major cities, during the height of the bicycle craze, a considerable number of commuters depended on bicycles as a primary mode of transportation. Exactly how far the commuters traveled, and thus how far the bicycle's suburbanization effects extended, is difficult to ascertain from extant sources. Yet, as contemporaries recognized, the bicycle's reach radically altered cyclists' daily routine. One observer, performed some simple calculations, based on the assumption that cyclists can travel about six times as far as walkers with the same exertion: "A man who lives in a suburban district...will go two and a half miles out and the same distance back, making his walk five miles." But on a bicycle, the fledgling mathematician continued, that same man can easily travel fifteen miles out and back in any direction, having thus extended his domain to around 707 square miles.³⁰ This was at a time when cities were still relatively

³⁰ "Bicycle-Riding," *Harper's Weekly*, January 12, 1895, 27.

compact and when many of the commuters who came by railway traveled less than twenty miles.³¹ Of course, it was not that simple. Although one of the greatest features of the bicycle was how little infrastructural support it demanded, cyclists still needed roads. Commuters' routes and the decision to bicycle to work, then, depended on the nature of a city's streets, their placement and quality, in addition to other more permanent factors, like topography and climate. Indeed, anyone standing in a major American city during "rush hour" would observe that cyclists moved over well-worn paths. Avoiding hills, poor road surfaces, and streets clogged by streetcars and their tracks, commuters rode through the city in packs.³² While it may be impossible to determine the exact origin of metropolitan commuters, traffic surveys, accident reports, and troves of anecdotal evidence confirm that commuting cyclists, indeed, swarmed through the city.

One city engineer from St. Paul, Minnesota, speaking in 1897 at an annual conference devoted to municipal improvements, warned that city designs must adapt to the new mode of commuting. An argument emerged about how best to accommodate cyclists, reorganize traffic, and lay bicycle paths. But there was no debate that "the use of the bicycle is now extended to almost every profession and occupation in life. Professional men in general and an army of clerks go to and from their houses and places of business, and the artisan to his work, on bicycles." The bicycle had earned its places as a legitimate and "proper vehicle for travel."³³

³¹ Eric H. Monkkenon, *America Becomes Urban: The Development of U.S. Cities & Towns, 1780-1980* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1988), 218.

³² "In an About Springfield. The 6 O'clock Bicycle Crowd. Throngs Going Home from Work," *Republican* (Springfield, Mass.), October 17, 1897.

³³ *Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Convention of the American Society of Municipal Improvements* (Milwaukee: Swain & Tate Co., 1897), 318-320.

At universities in Chicago, New York, Boston, and elsewhere, faculty members joined their students who pedaled to class.³⁴ The habit of commuting to and around campuses became so popular that a professor at Princeton University advised that for the typical student, “the bicycle is a necessity of his life, and on it he rides to recitations and lectures, to his meal and to the athletic field.” Likewise, high school students and teachers increasingly cycled to schools where school basements often doubled as bicycle garages.³⁵ Clerks, too, as one journalist observed in 1895, treasured “pedaling homeward after a tedious turn at the desk or sales counter.” Government employees cycled to work with regularity as well. In Washington D.C. a group of well over one-thousand employees wheeled their way to the State, War, and Navy Departments, joining thousands of others who rode to work in the nation’s capital.³⁶ The Treasury Department constructed a “bicycle stable” for its 1,900 employees. Located inside the Treasury Building, the stable, which sat above swimming pool-sized vaults filled with silver and bullion, housed some 500 bicycles, each of which had a special number and a corresponding parking spot.³⁷ A similar, albeit less grand, “bicycle lodge” serviced Boston’s cycling commuters who could drop off their bicycles in the downtown district and conduct their day’s business before riding home on their freshly detailed machine.³⁸ In Kansas City, a local reporter observed in 1896 that pleasure

³⁴ Cycling professors seemed to be so common on college campuses that some schools even started their own faculty bicycle clubs, like the U 5 Club (The Bicycle Department) that members of Harvard University’s Faculty of Arts and Science formed in 1894. General Information by and about the 1894. U 5 Club Records, Harvard University Archives.

³⁵ “The City’s Cycling Streets,” *New York Times*, May 12, 1895; Andrew Fleming West, “The American College” in Nicholas Murray Butler, ed., *Education in the United States: A Series of Monographs Prepared for the United States Exhibit at the Paris Exposition 1900* (Albany: J.B. Lyon Company, 1900), 233; Gilbert B. Morrison, “School Architecture and Hygiene,” in Butler, ed., *Education in the United States*, 449-450; “The Wheel in Institutions of Learning,” *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, June 7, 1896; “The Wheel in our Institutions of Learning,” *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, May 24, 1896.

³⁶ “The Decline of the Bicycle,” *New York Times*, September 13, 1900; Norman L. Dunham, “The Bicycle Era in American History” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1956), 448; “Bicycles Brought Washington’s First Traffic Problems,” *Sunday Star*, August, 9, 1942 in Vertical Files-Recreation, Sports-Bicycling, Box 20, Historical Society of Washington, D.C.

³⁷ “Bicycle Stable,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore), November 25, 1899.

³⁸ “Bicycle Lodge,” *Bicycling World*, May 3, 1895, 1090.

seekers used bicycles, too, “but anyone who will stand at a street corner or visit an industrial center at 6 o’clock any evening and count the bicycles that are used as conveyances for carrying workingmen and women home from their toil, or will observe the number that are employed for delivering packages, will soon discover that the wheel is more an instrument of utility than of pleasure.”³⁹ In Jacksonville, Florida, reporters acknowledged that “gradually, but surely, the bicycle has displaced the horse as a means of transportation,” declaring that the “wheel is king.”⁴⁰ And finally, as one Michigan judge cited as fact when deciding a case involving a cycling accident: “The bicycle has become almost a necessity for the use of workmen, clerks, and others in going to and from their places of work.”⁴¹

That factory workers and wage laborers also regularly cycled to work is made clear by the many manufacturing centers, built in the 1890s and early 1900s, with sizeable bicycle rooms for commuting employees. The Gorham Manufacturing Company, for example, opened its new factory and casino (essentially an employee clubhouse) on May Day, 1899. A producer of silver based in Providence, Rhode Island, the Gorham Manufacturing Company boasted about providing its workers a number of amenities. Most notably, the new Gorham facilities included a bicycle room that could store 400 bicycles. Each morning, upon arrival, employees left their vehicles with an attendant who stored the bicycles in a basement equipped with a numbered storage system and constant surveillance. Gorham’s cycle valet was an expanded version of a previous program, which despite its ten cents-a-week fee had proven quite popular. Even more telling is the fact that the company provided storage for 400 cyclists, while it only employed 1,100 workers. The Gorham Manufacturing Company was not alone. Countless other industrial

³⁹ “Wheeling into Favor,” *Kansas City Star*, September 17, 1896.

⁴⁰ “The Wheel is King” *Jacksonville Times Union*, June 22, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

⁴¹ Burdett A. Rich and Henry P. Farnham, eds., *The Lawyers Reports Annotated: Book LV* (Rochester: The Lawyers’ Co-operative Publishing Company, 1902), 308-9.

and agricultural plants, in and around America's cities, responded to the great number of laborers who commuted by bicycle.⁴² As one city engineer acknowledged, "provisions for the care of bicycles are now made in all large office buildings, manufacturing buildings, wholesale houses, and stores, where a large number of men and women are employed, and it is considered as essential to provide a place for the wheel."⁴³ Cycling New Yorkers, citing the large bicycle storage facilities already in place in Chicago, Boston, and Washington, D.C., demanded that their city asphalt a complete route from uptown to Lower Manhattan for commuters and that office buildings increase their bicycle storage to accommodate the large number of riders who cycle to work.⁴⁴ In Chicago, bicycle storage buildings, like modern day parking garages, offered urbanites, commuters or otherwise, a place to park their wheels for the night or by the hour.⁴⁵

Many of those workers who had once commuted by walking adopted the bicycle; more importantly, those suburbanites who once lived outside the range of walking distance could now consider the city as a local destination for work or pleasure. While *Arena* magazine and the *Philadelphia Record* may have been exaggerating when they claimed, respectively, that "around our great cities, the bicycle has been a leading factor in the building up of attractive suburbs" and that the bicycle enabled an unprecedented "demand for suburban or country homes for persons of small or moderate means," there were indeed small towns outside of Philadelphia and Boston that were "becoming the homes of men who ride to and from work every day."⁴⁶

⁴² National Civic Federation. Welfare Dept. *Conference on Welfare Work, Held at the Waldorf Astoria, New York city, March 16, 1904* (New York: Press of A.H. Kellogg, 1904), 28, 94-98, 156; William Howe Tolman, "Industrial Betterment" in Herbert B. Adams, ed., *Monographs on American Social Economics* (New York: The Social Service Press, 1900), 41-42.

⁴³ *Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Convention of the American Society of Municipal Improvements*, 319.

⁴⁴ "Buildings need Bicycle Facilities," *New York Press*, June 18, 1896, in *Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs*, New-York Historical Society, New York.

⁴⁵ *Chicago Cycler's Guide* (Chicago: Chicago Cycler's Guide, 1896), 9.

⁴⁶ Sylvester Baxter, "Economic and Social Influences of the Bicycle;" "The Bicycle as a Social Factor," *Philadelphia Record*, September 16, 1896.

Records from traffic accidents also reveal the popularity of bicycle commuting. Journalistic reports, as well as municipal records, not only confirm that cycling accidents were all too common, but oftentimes the reports included valuable information about who cycled. One report from an 1896 accident revealed that when Joseph B. Abecasis was struck by a wagon in New York's midtown, he was in the midst of his daily commute. As usual, he had been zigzagging his way down New York's grid en route to his office at the stock exchange.⁴⁷

Traffic surveys, which typically documented the number of vehicles passing by a particular intersection, confirm the centrality of the bicycle to the late-nineteenth-century American city. Unfortunately, since most engineers designed these surveys to ascertain the aggregate weight of traveling vehicles in order to determine appropriate paving materials, few traffic surveys bothered to count the relatively ultra-light bicycles. However, the city engineer of Minneapolis conducted traffic counts that included bicycles and reveal the extent of bicycle traffic. The surveys illuminate that urban cyclists were an important segment of the population that rode for utility and pleasure all year long. To be sure, more cyclists, especially those with a bent toward recreation and leisure, took to the streets on dry days in the warmer months. Nonetheless, that some persistent cyclists, almost certainly commuters, cycled regardless of the weather is also borne out by the data.⁴⁸

In Minneapolis on a cold, rainy day in December, counters tallied nearly 700 bicycles passing by a single intersection during the day, while on a dry day later in the same week some 1,475 bicycles sped down Nicollet Avenue. In sum, cyclists accounted for an average of nearly 23 percent of all vehicular traffic for the week accounted in the December, 1895 traffic survey.

⁴⁷ "Cyclist Run Down," *New York Evening World*, June 29, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

⁴⁸ City of Minneapolis, *Annual Report of the City Engineer for the year ending Dec. 31, 1895* (Minneapolis: City of Minneapolis, 1896), 22-25; City of Minneapolis, *Annual Report of the City Engineer of the City of Minneapolis* (Minneapolis: City of Minneapolis, 1906), 16-17.

Aside from Sundays, which saw a significant drop-off in cycling, no day seemed more or less popular. While there was no traffic count conducted in the spring or summer, the number of cyclists in those months would surely have been significantly higher.⁴⁹ Based on the ratio of warm weather cyclists to cold weather cyclists gleaned from later traffic counts, the most popular cycling days in the summer of 1895 would have likely seen more than 6,200 cyclists riding by a singular Minneapolis intersection. Taking into account that the number of horse-driven vehicles increased in warmer weather as well, on the busiest cycling days in 1895 the total number of riders on bicycles likely constituted about 45 percent of total vehicle traffic during the day.⁵⁰ Moreover, cycling in 1895 had not yet reached its peak in popularity. Over the course of the next two to three years, cycling in Minneapolis, as in most American cities, increased exponentially. Almost certainly, on some of the warm, sunny days in 1897, cyclists totaled more than 50 percent of all vehicular traffic passing between Fourth and Fifth Streets on Nicollet Avenue.

Other traffic surveys reveal similar trends. In Chicago, counters stationed on the fringe of the downtown business district watched as sunlight and cyclists filled the city in tandem. They documented that some ten thousand cyclists rode their bicycle to work each morning. During the peak rush, from 7:30-8:00 a.m., the numbers grew more intense. In one five minute span, 900 riders hurried by and, on the ever-popular Jackson Boulevard, counters noted that an astonishing

⁴⁹ City of Minneapolis, *Annual Report of the City Engineer for the Year Ending Dec. 31, 1895*, 22-25.

⁵⁰ These calculations were based on data from the 1906 traffic count. In that year, the average number of bicycles per day was 423 percent higher in the August-October period than the November-December period, while the average number of vehicles per day (excluding automobiles) averaged 37 percent higher in the August-October period compared to the November-December period. It is also important to note that both counts did not include the late evening riders who rode, probably in large numbers, after work for purposes of recreation. The 1895 daily count ends at 7 p.m. and the 1906 count ends at 6 p.m. Moreover, the traffic count included three different checkpoints at distinct intersections. Although they generally follow the same pattern, bicycle traffic at Nicolett Avenue was significantly higher than that of Bridge Square of Hennepin Avenue. City of Minneapolis, *Annual Report of the City Engineer of the City of Minneapolis*, 16-17; City of Minneapolis, *Annual Report of the City Engineer for Year Ending Dec. 31, 1895*, 22-25.

211 cyclists passed by in a single minute.⁵¹ In smaller cities as well, commuting cyclists steadily poured in throughout the morning and by the evening a mass exodus ensued. An 1897 survey from Springfield, Massachusetts, conducted at 6:00 p.m., reported a “stampede” of riders emanating from the city’s offices, shops, and factories. In just twenty minutes, a handful of traffic counters calculated 913 cyclists (of surely many more), described as overwhelmingly “business-like,” who exited the downtown district pedaling toward home.⁵²

In addition to those cyclists commuting into the city via bicycles, many commuters combined multiple forms of transportation. As the railroads transported crowds into cities each morning, riders from suburban homes too far from their place of work even for bike travel could ride to the rail station. That the railroads failed to provide secure storage for bicycles (a rival mode of transportation) was often a subject of complaint among suburban commuters. But with the “privilege” of “decreased rent,” as a San Francisco newspaper described, and of enabling commuters to live not only farther from the city but also farther from the railroad station, many riders toted their wheels on the train and stored their bicycles at the urban terminus.⁵³

Of course, bicycles merely joined, and did not replace, other forms of transportation, which had already extended the city’s radius. In the late nineteenth century, streetcars gained enormously in scope and in popularity. In Philadelphia, for example, the total number of streetcar passengers rose from about 99 million in 1880 to just over 292 million in 1900, as total track mileage increased from 298 miles to 470 miles. While 292 million passengers and 470 miles of track may seem like staggeringly high numbers, many urban residents never rode the streetcars and much of the city remained inaccessible or poorly accessible by rail. The 292

⁵¹ “Utilitarian Side of Cycling,” *The Cycle Age and Trade Review*, September, 22, 1898, 602.

⁵² “In an About Springfield. The 6 O’clock Bicycle Crowd. Throngs Going Home from Work,” *Republican* (Springfield, Massachusetts), October 17, 1897.

⁵³ “Bicyclists and the Railroads,” *San Francisco Call*, June 1, 1897.

million passengers represented, on a per capita basis, about 128 rides, or just below 2.5 rides per week per person. Most of these rides consisted of recreation and shopping trips or to a transportation connection—riding to a local ferry or railway station; the majority of streetcar use was not for commuting.⁵⁴

Likewise, certain sections of major cities often remained un-serviced or poorly serviced by streetcars. Since streetcars often moved only one way down a street (sometimes the inbound and outbound directions would be several blocks apart) and since many American cities, including Philadelphia and a great portion of New York, adopted a grid system, thereby preventing streetcar tracks from running diagonally across the urban core, city residents often found it more efficient to walk, or cycle, around the city.⁵⁵ Because private companies operated urban streetcar lines, there was no unified system of tracks. Indeed, the absence of any long-term, formalized city-wide planning crippled urban transit, which was not successfully conceived as a whole until many years later. The result was that riders were often forced to take multiple lines, operated by different companies, and thus required to pay more than the usual five cent fare.⁵⁶ Cycling, then, had its advantages.

In fact, the Pennsylvania Bureau of Railways concluded that cycling had taken away significant business from the streetcars. As the chief of the bureau hypothesized in early 1898, “the use of the bicycle by business people and pleasure seekers is the prolific source of the reduction in the receipts of many street railways.” That assumption was based on a traffic

⁵⁴ Theodore Hershberg et al., “The ‘Journey-to-Work’: An Empirical Investigation of Work, Residence and Transportation, Philadelphia, 1850 and 1880 in Theodore Hershberg, ed., *Philadelphia: Work, Space, Family and Group Experience in the Nineteenth Century: Essays toward an Interdisciplinary History of the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 151-153.

⁵⁵ Monkkonen, *America Becomes Urban*, 160-161. Similar trends were reported in Toronto. See Christopher Armstrong and H.V. Nelles, *The Revenge of the Methodist Bicycle Company: Sunday Streetcars and Municipal Reform in Toronto, 1888-1897* (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates Limited, 1977), 169-171.

⁵⁶ Hershberg, “The ‘Journey-to-Work,’” 143-151; Jon C. Teaford, *The Unheralded Triumph: City Government in America, 1870-1900* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 239; Sylvester Baxter, “Public Control of Urban Transit,” *The Cosmopolitan*, November, 1894, 58.

survey, conducted in Harrisburg in the fall of 1897. City officials tracked the number of cyclists vis-à-vis the number of streetcar passengers who passed a given point from 7:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. The data were clear: 1,962 people rode by on the cars, 4,116 (or some 67.7 percent) on bicycles.⁵⁷ Cycling in Harrisburg, like much of urban America, was becoming a primary way to move about and “shrink” the city. In 1897, in large part because of the bicycle, total streetcar usage across American cities had declined over the last year, the *Street Railway Journal* reported.⁵⁸

In 1897, when the President of the New York State Street Railway Association declared, “The bicycle is now our too successful competitor,” and “It operates without franchise of track, and pays no taxes,” streetcar operators around the country could no longer brush off the pesky bicycle as a nuisance.⁵⁹ Cycling, they thought, was here to stay. To patch their bleeding coffers, companies began to invite, rather than shun, cyclists. Street railways offered to tow cyclists and their wheels to destinations in and outside of the city. In Pittsburgh, the Second Avenue Traction Company, recognizing that “the furore for bicycling is very pronounced” in its city, decided to “cater to the wheelmen” in order to recover the income lost due to cycling. Shuttling urbanites within the city and to the country roads beyond Pittsburgh’s hills, bicycle cars, fit with on-board bicycle racks, offered a fifteen cent fare for both the bicycle and its owner.⁶⁰ Even in San Francisco, where protesting cyclists and streetcar operators had violently clashed a year earlier, the Market Street Railway in the summer of 1897 debuted its “bicycle hanger.” The device,

⁵⁷ *Interstate Commerce Commission. Twelfth Annual Convention of Railroad Commissioners. May 1900* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1900); “The Street Car’s Rival: Bicycle Has Certainly Hurt the Railway Business,” *Emporia Gazette*, February 7, 1898; “Street Railways Lose Money,” *Cycle Age and Trade Review*, January 8, 1898, 333.

⁵⁸ *Street Railway Journal*, July 1897, 419; Calvin G. Godrich, *A History of the Minneapolis Street Railway Company: Covering 35 Years—1873-1908* (Minneapolis: Brooks Press, 1909), 16.

⁵⁹ “The New York State Street Railway Association,” *Street Railway Journal*, October 1897, 633.

⁶⁰ “Transportation of Bicycles,” *Street Railway Journal*, July 1897, 425.

attached to both ends of the street car, could hold two bicycles. Charging five cents for the service, the Railway found that the racks quickly paid for themselves.⁶¹

In aggregate, the combination of streetcars, railroads, and bicycles enlarged the range of travel and expanded the bounds of commuting. Even though most workers continued to live, by today's standards, extremely close to their places of work, it was in the midst of the bicycle era that suburbanization began in earnest.⁶² While streetcars have appropriately garnered more attention as a trigger in early suburbanization, bicycles should not be discounted as a serious tool for workers commuting into and around American cities. As streetcar lines and suburban growth extended radially from the city center, it was, on a limited scale, bicycles and ultimately, on a much larger scale, automobiles that enabled commuters to live anywhere on the city's periphery and not just along a linear streetcar path. Bicycles could provide door-to-door service, shortening the commute, reducing costs, and all the while turning the commute into recreation instead of a chore. Even though bicycles soon disappeared as a popular vehicle for commuting, in the 1890s bicycles joined a combination of forces—other transportation technologies, innovations in home construction, and a deepening appreciation for the suburban aesthetic—that led to suburbanization.⁶³

Throughout the 1890s, bicycles evolved into a practical vehicle used for an array of practical purposes. No longer simply the domain of a select class of men (who almost always seemed to wear a moustache) taking short leisure rides through the city, bicycles attracted a wider

⁶¹ *Street Railway Journal*, August 1897, 500.

⁶² For example, in 1880 Philadelphia, the average journey-to-work was still within a one mile radius. Although this measure continually expanded throughout the next few decades, in absolute terms commuting distances remained relatively short. Hershberg, "The 'Journey to Work,'" 143-151.

⁶³ Sam Bass Warner, *Streetcar Suburbs: the Process of Growth in Boston, 1870-1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962); Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*; Dolores Hayden, *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).

following and were put to use in almost every conceivable manner. As the *Philadelphia Record* reported in 1896, finally “the bicycle has been recognized as a machine so distinctly practical in its purpose and intended for real use, and, moreover, hard use” that bicycles no longer warranted special decorations or ostentatious displays.⁶⁴ Bicycles had become a completely normal fixture of urban life as cycling commuters, delivery boys, and policemen blended into the urban landscape. And as more and more riders crisscrossed the urban grid daily, a growing group of riders recognized yet another function of the bicycle and another promise of the cycling city: health.

Healthy Cities

“Honestly, the bicycle has done more for the good of the human race than all the medicines compounded since the days of Hippocrates.”⁶⁵

- *The Journal of Hygiene*, November 1896

“...the sanitarians have seen nothing that gave so grand an impulse to the health movement as the cycling crusade, which...is one of the leading features of the century.”⁶⁶

- Benjamin Ward Richardson, 1897

“Biffers—Do you think bicycle riding conducive to health?
Whiffers – Most assuredly. My health has improved wonderfully.

‘But you don’t ride a bicycle.’

‘Who said I did?’

‘But you said bicycle riding improved your health’

‘Yes; get so much exercise you, know’

‘Exercise? How?’

‘Dodging the bicycles.’”⁶⁷

- *New York Times*, 1894

⁶⁴ “The Practical Bicycle,” *Philadelphia Record*, June 22, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

⁶⁵ “For and Against the Bicycle,” *The Journal of Hygiene*, November 1896, 304.

⁶⁶ Richardson, *Vita Medica: Chapters of Medical Life and Work* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1897), 247.

⁶⁷ “A Boon Indeed,” *New York Times*, November 7, 1894.

Nineteenth-century cities' pungent odors, dingy streets, and darkened buildings represented the worst of urban living. Crime and poverty lived most comfortably in America's densest neighborhoods. And it was the cities that provided the epicenter for history's great epidemics and most storied riots. In short, cities were not simply microcosms of society at large, but rather places of extremes. Cities offered unparalleled attractions—grandeur and wealth, cultural amenities, vast social networks, efficiencies of capital, and the seemingly endless opportunities to indulge in life's guiltiest pleasures—and the unparalleled disadvantages that come naturally with densely populated areas. But as the twentieth century approached, it was the evils of urban living that earned American cities their reputation for chaos and disorder; dirtiness, ugliness, and dangerousness; and for their impoverished, uneducated, and uncouth inhabitants who seemed to comprise an ever-growing proportion of the urban population.⁶⁸

Reformers, however, imagined a different kind of city. Libraries would educate and welfare institutions reform the troubled population. Political corruption would be replaced by a new system of municipal management defined by efficiency and run by disinterested experts. Perhaps no issue, though, was more important than improving the health of the city and its residents. Professional health departments, finally, became an official organ of municipal governments. Journals and national associations devoted to the rising number of sanitarians grew in numbers and prominence.⁶⁹ Sanitarians, engineers, doctors, and city improvers exposed the dangers of the urban environment and began to espouse a number of remedies. Armed by a new philosophy of moral environmentalism that embraced the idea of better surroundings as the salve for urbanity's deleterious effects, reformers sought to recast America's cities into beautiful,

⁶⁸ For more on how contemporaries understood and “perceived” the problems of urban life and necessary forms see, Andrew Lees, *Cities Perceived: Urban Society in European and American thought, 1820-1940* (Great Britain: Columbia University Press, 1985). For more on the general waves of urban reform in Gilded Age cities, see Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 123-191.

⁶⁹ Teaford, *Unheralded Triumph*, 150-155.

ordered spaces that would promote harmony and an improved citizenry. Most famously, supporters of the “City Beautiful” movement, as it later came to be known, promoted Beaux-Arts Architecture, classical design, and civic monuments meant to inspire. The grand, tree-lined boulevards that urban cyclists enjoyed symbolized this powerful new dogma. Supporters assumed that the boulevards, like the obelisks, monuments, oversized civic spaces, and arresting architecture that came to define the movement would awe and uplift city dwellers; but, for a growing group of landscape architects, medical experts, and reformers, it was nature that could truly provide the cure-all for the ugliest of urban behaviors.⁷⁰

By enabling city dwellers to escape the city and fully explore nature’s wonder, bicycles became a common prescription for urban maladies. Frenetic urbanites could cycle their way to solace, respite, and mental health. At the same time, as Americans came to realize the value of exercise, the bicycle emerged as a favorite device for improving one’s physical health. Exercising cyclists joined, and often doubled as, leisure riders or cycling commuters. It was, in part, because so few other transportation options (save walking) served the multi-functional purpose of transporting and exercising that urbanites prized the bicycle. Finally, the bicycle contributed to the larger efforts to clean up the city itself. While being able to escape the city might have been the most powerful antidote to urban living, cyclists participated in several urban environmental reform campaigns. Late-nineteenth-century Americans were well aware of, if not entirely knowledgeable about, the unhealthy living conditions that plagued their cities. And it was bicycles that offered a corrective to the ills of urban living, so a writer for *Scribner’s Magazine* in 1896 explained: “But altogether apart from the actual physiological betterment from deep breathing, swiftly coursing blood, and the purer air of the parks, there is a psychic and

⁷⁰ M. Christine Boyer, *Dreaming the Rational City: The Myth of American City Planning* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983), 33-60; Bonz Szczygiel, “‘City Beautiful’ Revisited: An Analysis of Nineteenth-Century Civic Improvement Efforts,” *Journal of Urban History*, 29 (January 2003): 107-132.

moral void in city life which the ‘bike’ goes farther toward filling than any other institution.”⁷¹ By bringing nature squarely within the urban realm, by promoting physical exercise, and by contributing to broader environmental reform, bicycles appeared to solve one of the biggest problems affecting American cities and the people who filled them.

“A rural landscape which omits the city and an urban landscape which omits the country are radically incomplete as portraits of their shared world.”⁷² So wrote William Cronon as he recast the field of urban history with his groundbreaking study of Chicago’s development, *Nature’s Metropolis*. Cronon’s study was and remains remarkable because it adroitly married two previously divorced narratives: the history of the city and the history of rural America. Just as most historians, before Cronon unveiled the now obvious codependency, had failed to see past the invisible walls separating city and country, nineteenth-century Americans were also frighteningly aware of the seemingly impenetrable boundaries that separated urbanity and rurality.

In 1880 the American psychologist, G. Stanley Hall, found that the majority of Boston’s primary school-age incoming students had “never seen a plow or spade, a robin, squirrel, snail or sheep; they had never observed peaches on a tree or growing grain and could not distinguish an oak tree from a willow or poplar.”⁷³ That the majority of urban residents, children and adults, had become alienated from nature and that the city environment seemed to lack all of the salutary features of a pastoral life—wildlife, clean air and water, ample space, and natural beauty—

⁷¹ “Secret of the Bicycle,” *Scribner’s Magazine*, July 1896, 132.

⁷² William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991), 51.

⁷³ Arthur Meier Schlesinger, *The Rise of the City, 1878-1898* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933), 128. For more on Hall and his concern about children losing contact with nature, or as Gail Bederman describes, being “overcivilized” see, Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 77-120.

signaled alarm.⁷⁴ In response, certain school administrators touted the bicycle as an educational tool and as a way to broaden the limited experiences and narrow confines of the urban population. For the kinds of students who Hall had surveyed, those who had never seen robins fly or hugged an oak tree, there was “no better way of teaching how wide and varied the world is, than to let them begin their exploration and investigation near their homes” atop a bicycle.⁷⁵ Bicycle trips for school-age children, and even more so, for urban adults, brought an environment antithetical to that of the city within convenient reach.

Much earlier in the nineteenth century and long before bicycles arrived in serious numbers, Americans had participated in recreation and physical activities within the urban core. As the historian Steven Riess has argued, “the walking city contained quiet streets with vacant lots available for sports; unpolluted rivers were close by for swimming and fishing; and even the woods were not too far away for hunting and other field sports.”⁷⁶ Yet, by the end of the nineteenth century, the largest American cities housed more than a million densely packed people, buildings that reached toward the sky, and fringes that seemed to be continually swallowed up by ever-expanding metropolises. The previously “empty spaces were filled in [and] the countryside became less accessible to the masses... making sporting options unevenly available to urban populations.”⁷⁷ Even for the city’s more elite residents, who could often secure a more spacious and airy environment, dense populations and a frenetic pace of life were the prime suspects in a number of urban maladies. Nervousness, fatigue, and depression were general symptoms of “neurasthenia,” a widespread nineteenth-century diagnosis that

⁷⁴ Boyer, *Dreaming the Rational City*, 16-17.

⁷⁵ Charles W. Mann, *School Recreations and Amusements* (New York: American Book Company, 1896), 171.

⁷⁶ Steven A. Riess, *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 6-7.

⁷⁷ Riess, *City Games*, 6-7. See also, Peter Baldwin, *Domesticating the Street: The Reform of public Space in Hartford, 1850-1930* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999), 5.

characterized the ill effects of urbanization and the increased rapidity of daily life. City life and the over-stimulation that came with it—the feverish pace, the ringing noise, office work, etc.—so the theory went, overtaxed urbanite’s nerves, leading to neurological disorder.⁷⁸ In New York particularly, doctors diagnosed a series of diseases wrought by over-exposure to the urban environment. One doctor even defined a new condition, “Newyorkitis,” which supposedly afflicted countless Manhattanites, especially those who had recently moved from the country to the city. As Dr. John Girdner wrote: “Newyorkitis is a disease in which the mind, soul, and body have departed more or less from the normal...the mental appetite of a Newyorkitic is morbid and perverted.”⁷⁹ Ironically, the bicycle, as an innovation in technology and speed, emblemized the larger processes of urbanization and industrialization that stood at the heart of the newfound nervousness and was thus conceived of as both a cause of, and solution for, the chaotic nature of urbanity.⁸⁰

In one respect, riders and doctors endorsed cycling to increase vigor, steady nerves, and, in many cases cure neurasthenia and other maladies. One convert, who was not alone in his appraisal, said, “I felt that the bicycle had saved my life. Certainly it did save me from a complete breakdown...”⁸¹ It did not take long for doctors to become convinced: “As a mental specialist I have seen the gravest forms of neurasthenia and melancholia yield before this

⁷⁸ Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization*, 84-88; T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 47-58. For on an analysis that focuses particularly on women and nervous diseases like neurasthenia see Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 197-216. For more on the relationship between urban nervousness, neurasthenia, and modernity in Berlin see, Andreas Killen, *Berlin Electropolis: Shock, Nerves, and German Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

⁷⁹ John H. Girdner, *NewYorkitis* (New York: Grafton Press, 1901), 25-39.

⁸⁰ Richard Harmond, “Progress and Flight: An Interpretation of the American Cycle Craze of the 1890’s,” *Journal of Social History* 5 (Winter, 1971-1972): 246. One doctor went so far as condemn bicycles for contributing to the “nervous condition” of city cyclists in a malady he termed, the “vibratory habit.” “Echoes and News,” *The Medical News*, May 2, 1896, 499.

⁸¹ J.H.K., “Therapeutic Value of the Bicycle,” *Modern Medicine and Bacteriological World*, April 1893, 100-102.

marvelous machine...”⁸² Another doctor, who found that cycling could aid neurasthenia, chronic headaches, and an assortment of other ailments, described the bicycle as “not a luxury, but a necessity” for all of those subject to “mental tension and nervous irritability,” meaning, perhaps, anyone living in the modern American city.⁸³ Finally, in an 1892 article entitled “The Bicycle in the Treatment of Nervous Diseases,” a well-known physician chronicled the wild success he had treating neurasthenics via the bicycle. For each of his six patients, the bicycle proved to be the long-awaited remedy.⁸⁴

Yet, speeding bicycles also played a part in the quickening of urban life and the accompanying mental fatigue. In fact, the bicycle’s speed was one its most distinguishing characteristics. Described by one cycling advocate, “those who have not ridden bicycles do not know of the exhilarating and enlivening influence of such exercise. It is enchanting to sweep through the air with such ease and speed.”⁸⁵ Some riders took the exhilaration too far. Scorchers sped around the city. Drag racers turned ordinary roads into makeshift velodromes. And speed limits and traffic laws did little to slow darting riders or curb the rising number of traffic accidents. In this sense, bicycles added to the industrial roar of the American city—the clanging of pipes and the thunderous movements of the elevateds, the chaos on the streets and the medium-speed collisions, the obsession with speed and time saved. In fact, vehicles, including bicycles, that supplied their users with superior speeds only created more demand for even greater speeds.⁸⁶

⁸² C. Lombroso, “The Bicycle and Crime,” *The Pall Mall Magazine*, 1900, 316.

⁸³ “The Wheel and Disease,” *American Wheelman*, July 16, 1896, 32.

⁸⁴ Graeme M. Hammond, “The Bicycle in the Treatment of Nervous Diseases,” *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 1892, 37-46.

⁸⁵ Albert L. Gihon, “The Bicycle as a Sanitary Measure,” in American Public Health Association, *Public Health Papers and Reports Vol. XXII* (Concord, N.H.: Republican Press Association, 1897), 53. See also, E.H. Lacon Watson, “Bicycle Tours—and a Moral,” *Westminster Review*, July to December 1894, 169.

⁸⁶ As the novelist Booth Tarkington wrote about streetcars in *The Magnificent Ambersons*, but which could have equally applied to bicycles: “In good weather the mule pulled the car a mile in a little less than twenty minutes,

The bicycle, then, was no simple “machine in the garden” teasing out tension between technological progress and the pastoral ideal.⁸⁷ By offering urbanites a physical and mental escape from the city, the bicycle served as more than a tool promoting the rise of the industrial city. It was never a *machine in the garden* but a rather a *machine to get to the garden*. And it was the gardens that provided the healthful tonics for the urban cyclists. In other words, the cleaner and healthier cities were the ones with the easiest exits.

In the latter portion of the nineteenth century, urban Americans surrounded by artificialities, machines, and industrial order developed a new appreciation for nature. In 1896, a writer articulated the new perspective:

It will be admitted that the conditions of life in cities are not conducive to health or morality; that rest and recreation must be found outside; that we, as people are getting too far away from Nature and her teachings and live too much in the forced atmosphere of a social hothouse. There can be no remedy so efficacious as this to get back again to Nature, to her teachings and her works.⁸⁸

Thus, meadows and mountains, rivers and rocks could provide therapeutic solace and simple pleasure wholly absent from the urban sphere. The popularity of the back-to-nature movement evinced itself in various ways.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Britain’s Sir Ebenezer Howard found an eager and transnational audience for his version of a utopian community—“the Garden City.” The most distinguishing feature of these self-sufficient, small-scale, and pre-planned communities was that rings of nature (or green belts) would surround the “garden city” and reconnect its

unless the stops were too long; but when the trolley-car came, doing its mile in five minutes and better, it would wait for nobody. Nor could its passengers have endured such a thing, because the faster they were carried the less time they had to spare! In the days before deathly contrivances hustled them through their lives, and when they had no telephones—another ancient vacancy profoundly responsible for leisure—they had time for everything: time to think, to talk, time to read, time to wait for a lady!” Booth Tarkington, *The Magnificent Ambersons* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1918), 11-12.

⁸⁷ Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

⁸⁸ Mann, *School Recreations and Amusements*, 171-172.

residents with the natural world.⁸⁹ Concurrently, novelists and journalists glorified the country. Magazines and newspapers devoted to out-of-door activities flooded urban newsstands. And Congress, in 1890, established Yosemite and Sequoia National Parks. Taken together, rural America developed into a kind of mental and physical “playground” for urban Americans.⁹⁰ Nature and wildlife offered space for the body to ramble and the mind to roam. While some of the curative attributes of nature and recreation had long been lauded as valuable and had served as the impetus for the rural cemetery movement and the expansion of urban parks, the back to nature movement intensified in the late nineteenth century and, more importantly, moved out of the exclusive domain of the wealthy and became an obsession for many in the urban middle class.⁹¹ The countryside had been glorified. And it was atop bicycles that crowds of urban worshippers flocked to the temple of nature.

Just as bicycles enabled a select group of suburbanites to have access to the city and urbanites greater access within the city, it was the bicycle that afforded city residents an unprecedented ability to access the suburban fringe and the much cherished and more distant countryside. Contemporary riders and writers marveled at the machine’s ability to shrink what had been a vast gap between these diverse worlds. Described in an 1895 article published in the *Century Magazine*, the cycling phenomenon promised to “bring the city and the country into closer relations.” Urban wheelmen and wheelwomen exploring the countryside toted with them “modern ideas and modern ways of living, and...gentle distillations of city wealth,” while the natural beauty of the countryside returned a set of calmer, healthier, and rejuvenated riders back

⁸⁹ Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1902).

⁹⁰ Peter J. Schmidt, *Back to Nature: The Arcadian Myth in Urban America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), xviii; John Higham, “The Reorientation of American Culture in the 1890’s,” in John Weiss, ed., *The Origins of Modern Consciousness* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1965), 26-45.

⁹¹ Schmidt, *Back to Nature*, 4.

to the city.⁹² Another advocate, in 1896, described the bicycle as “a distance destroyer. It brings city and country close together and places ‘green fields and running brooks’ where once there were but smoky walls and a heavy atmosphere.”⁹³ The two worlds of city and country no longer seemed so distant or distinct.

Previously un-chartered territory now seemed within easy reach via the bicycle. Earlier generations, according to a writer in 1892, “would seldom go beyond strolling distance from their homes,” but “on the bicycle they are constantly roaming throughout many surrounding towns, beholding fresh and varied scenes.”⁹⁴ Once there, the city cyclists could enjoy all of the sights so noticeably absent from their quotidian routine. In particular, as one rider described in 1898, cyclists sought out the vistas and scents, the flowers and wildlife, the most natural of wonders that could no longer be found inside man-made cities. The chief objectives of a rural cycling trip, he wrote, were “to see whether that grand patch of heather on the other side of the common is yet in bloom, to find out whether the sloes are ripe...to see how the sunset looks through the pines in the distant forest.”⁹⁵ Another cyclist described similar goals and the unparalleled experiences of venturing out of the city atop two wheels:

Just now, while the primeval woods are looking for the coming leaf-time, when the brooks that have been long hidden are gleaming in the light, when the cattle are lowing the meadows, and glad with the first day of liberty my wheel and I have beautiful times together. We are at home in our world. And when we are off together, miles and miles from town, and the air is crisp and tonic, the sunlight a genial friend, when I am spinning over the rough country road with the blood bounding through my veins, with every pore of the skin alert, and with the heart live; when the swift motion carries me on like a thing of wings, and the exhilaration fills me with a sense of exultant power, then it seems that the wheel is well worth living for, and makes all life richer.⁹⁶

⁹² “Bicycle Problems and Benefits,” *The Century Magazine*, July 1895, 474-475. See also, Joseph B. Bishop, “Social and Economic Influence of the Bicycle,” *The Forum*, August, 1896, 685.

⁹³ “A Growing Fad,” *L.A.W. Bulletin and Good Roads*, October 16, 1896, 513-514.

⁹⁴ Baxter, “Economic and Social Influences of the Bicycle,” 583.

⁹⁵ “The Gentle Art of Cycling,” *MacMillan’s Magazine*, January 1898, 204.

⁹⁶ Jean Porter Rudd, “My Wheel and I,” *Outing*, May 1895, 128.

Going so far as to credit the bicycle with bringing nature back to its place within our lives, this rider further remarked that the “Gentle Art” of cycling “has brought nature and man together in a way that not even the arts of poetry and painting have hitherto succeeded in doing.”⁹⁷ The list could go on and on. In short, by promising to bring down the invisible walls that encased most American cities, bicycles attracted the masses while reconfiguring the ever-changing dynamic between crowded cities and the relatively open spaces that surrounded them.

Of course, railroads and other modes of public transportation connected the city to the country, but the bicycle provided a unique form of spatial flexibility. Without fixed schedules or routes, a cyclist could ride to the neighboring suburbs or countryside on the weekend or after work. “There is no rush to a railway station, no preliminary wading through time-tables, not even a horse to be harnessed,—no anxiety of any kind,” a cyclist in 1898 explained. “A little oil in the bearings, perhaps a few strokes of the inflator, a turn of the screw of the gear-case, stride over the saddle, and off you go!”⁹⁸ To aid these explorers, an entire industry developed, offering cycling maps, guidebooks, suggested routes, coveted tips, and almost always, suggestions for how cyclists could most quickly exit the city and immerse themselves in the surrounding country.⁹⁹

With a map in hand and with no fixed schedule or special fare, an individual cyclist or a small group of riders could leave the city with few preparations and even fewer plans. Late-nineteenth-century cyclists repeatedly referred to the “liberation” and “freedom” provided by the bicycle. Writing in 1900, one urban cyclist recounted that “there is something incomparably cheering in the consciousness that by one’s own exertions, and at one’s own gait and time, one is

⁹⁷ “The Gentle Art of Cycling,” 204.

⁹⁸ “The Gentle Art of Cycling,” 204. See also, “The Wheel in California,” *Overland Monthly*, October 1893, 391.

⁹⁹ See, for example, Rand, McNally & Co., *Rand, McNally & Co’s Handy Guide to the Country around New York for the Wheelman, Driver, and Excursionist* (New York: Rand, McNally & Co., Publishers, 1896).

leaving the toil and moil and torment of the town farther and farther in the distance.” The attractions of nature, he continued, tempted cyclists “to leave the town, to scorn the scorching imps, and to hie through breeze and brake to where the humming of insects and the scent of clover give the reward you are seeking.”¹⁰⁰ Without the thunder of the railroads and the crowds of public transportation, bicycles, so their most devoted riders reported, served as the only way to lose oneself in the splendor of nature.

The newfound independent mobility allowed masses of city residents the possibilities of a segregated life: a workday in the chaotic, polluted city, and an evening or weekend of leisure spent in the unadulterated country air and tranquility of nature. For many, the latter made the former more bearable. “To get into real rural scenery, and for the time being forget all that pertains to cities and the rush of business,” bicycles transformed the lives of city dwellers, *L.A.W. Bulletin and Good Roads Magazine* advertised in 1896.¹⁰¹ Not long after returning from work, urban riders fled the city under dim-lit skies looking for the fastest exit. One commentator, quite astutely, observed that it always seemed as though the “first aim” of urban cyclists was to “escape from the crowded part of the city,” presumably, in search of a contrary, non-urban landscape.¹⁰²

The phenomenon was widespread across America’s largest cities. Coney Island’s beaches and Westchester’s hills, for example, stood within striking distance for New York cyclists. Coney Island, in particular, in no small part because of the bicycle path leading to its shores, regularly welcomed throngs of urban cyclists. There, dozens of shops offered to repair, clean, and check the visitors’ wheels as riders from Manhattan and throughout Brooklyn waded into the

¹⁰⁰ “The Road and its Rewards,” *Outing*, June 1900, 299.

¹⁰¹ “Signs of the Times,” *L.A.W. Bulletin and Good Roads Magazine*, July 31, 1896, 153.

¹⁰² *Appletons’ Dictionary of New York and its Vicinity*, 88-89.

ocean or napped along the oversized beach. Day-tripping (or often evening-tripping) cyclists in Coney Island became so numerous that the business of valeting bicycles turned into beachfront theater. The proprietors of Albert & Rawlin's shop promised to outdo their rivals by offering cycling customers a free cleaning and guarantee (up to \$100) that their bicycles would remain safe under their watch.¹⁰³ Other businesses, including taverns, restaurants, and repair shops soon began wooing, and catering to, the growing group of recreational riders. One hotel, eager to attract New York riders, proudly advertised that it paid special attention to "cyclists cuisine."¹⁰⁴



Figure 3.3: A group of cyclists gathered on the beach at Coney Island in 1897. Source: Byron Company. From the Collections of the Museum of the City of New York.

¹⁰³ "Brooklyn Wheelmen," *New York Recorder*, June 10, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

¹⁰⁴ Advertisement for Van Buren's-By-The-Sea in League of American Wheelmen in *Fifty Miles Around New York: A Book of Maps and Descriptions of the Best Roads, Streets, and Routes for Cyclists and Horsemen* (New York: New York State Division of the League of American Wheelmen, 1896).

In San Francisco as well, newspapers published bicycle routes that highlighted the most direct pathways to quick respite from urban life. After but a brief ride from the city center, “the sweet scent of willows comes on the air, and the gurgling of water over a pebbly bed is heard.” While railway cars offered San Franciscans a chance to espy the magnificence of Marin or the placid waters of nearby Lake Chabot, as a reporter from the *San Francisco Call* advised his readers in 1897, only the bicycle ensured a truly intimate experience: “You must get close to nature’s heart if you would feel it beat.”¹⁰⁵ Likewise, in Philadelphia, thousands rode each weekend to neighboring “country places” and in Chicago to nearby lakes and vistas, which transformed into backdrops for cycling parties and even cycling picnics.¹⁰⁶

Perhaps no activity is more emblematic of the kind of pastoral oasis that urban cyclists sought than the “bicycle picnic.” When the sun shone and the winds eased, groups of cyclists fled the chaos of Chicago on trips that could measure fifty miles. Winding through charming country roads, cyclists could pause and slake their thirst at one of the quaint farmhouses that ringed the city. As a veteran wheelwoman from Chicago explained, “A bicycle picnic is almost as good as a vacation. It gives you exercise and gets you out in the country, and gives you a great deal more fun that you can have just riding around the boulevards.” Although picnic sites, like most other non-urban places of recreation, could be accessed via train, the exact locations of such spaces were predetermined by where tracks had been laid and the timing of such events proscribed by railroad management and the whims of the conductor. But on a bicycle, as the same Chicago wheelwoman pointed out, “you can go where you like” and when you like.¹⁰⁷

Whether it was outside Chicago, Kansas City, or elsewhere, the practice of picnicking via

¹⁰⁵ “Unfrequented Bicycle Roads in the Vicinity of San Francisco,” *San Francisco Call*, April 18, 1897.

¹⁰⁶ “Twas an Ideal Day for Cyclers,” *Philadelphia Press*, August 31, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

¹⁰⁷ “People in Chicago taking Bicycle Picnics,” *Chicago Times Herald*, June 9, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

bicycle had become so popular that cyclists could purchase a bicycle attachment especially designed to tote a picnic basket.¹⁰⁸

That bicycles enabled city men and women to leave the artifices of the city and experience the nearby, un-tinkered-with natural environment was also well documented in contemporary popular culture. Novels, short stories, cartoons, and poems often featured cycling as a central theme. One poem, published in 1896 (as part of a 150-page compendium of poems all devoted to cycling) nicely explores how urban cyclists spent their Sundays, even if the poet was no wordsmith:

It is from the club it takes them, from
the pot-house, from the street,
As it bears them off rejoicing to the country fresh and sweet.

White-faced office-boys it carries to the
woods, where thrushes sing,
To the fields, where whirring coveys from
the wavering wheat-stalks spring;
Care-worn city clerks it hurries off to
nature's fairest scenes—
Flower-decked meads and trellised hop-
grounds; babbling brooks and vil-
lage greens
Round-backed artisans it bears, too, from
the small and stuffy room,
To the lanes where trailing roses all the
summer air perfumes;
And it makes them grow forgetful of the
stifling, man-made town,
As they climb the breezy roadway o'er
the swelling, God-made down.¹⁰⁹

Just as in the poems and short-stories, novels and songs, everyday Americans extolled the bicycle as a means to break away from the normal course of metropolitan pandemonium. Being able to escape the city, move so freely around it, and to do so with such swiftness were some of

¹⁰⁸ "Picnics a La Bicycle," *The Kansas City Star*, May 24, 1896.

¹⁰⁹ The American Wheelman, "A New View of Sunday Cycling" in Edmond Redmond, *Lyra Cyclus; or, the Bards and the Bicycle* (Rochester: 1897), 129-130.

the most cherished characteristics of the machine. Perhaps it is not surprising then that in the 1890s cyclists often zoomorphized their bicycles, analogizing their machines to birds, making it possible to fly in and out of the city. In the days before mechanized aviation, it was the bicycle that enchanted Americans. “I tell you, it’s a bird!” a businessman boasted about his bicycle in 1896.¹¹⁰ Not alone, an envious mother from Illinois remarked that “I see my young daughters fly like an angel, and I hope some day to gather the impetus to fly.”¹¹¹ An instructor at Barnard College, referring to the 1895 Spalding, Model D bicycle he had just bought, cheerfully declared that “my new wheel is a bird.”¹¹² Even a clergyman could not help but catch bicycle fever as he praised the bicycle during his sermon in 1895, citing that “it enables us to fly before we get angelic wings.”¹¹³ For the many obsessed with speed, and before automobiles could satisfy their impulses, bicycles provided an exhilaration of movement coupled with the possibility of transporting its driver into a different world. The ability to escape and “fly” away from the perils of city life was equally recognized by bicycle manufacturers, including avian-titled companies like “Falcon” or “Eagle,” who began to feature more and more references to birds, wings, and angels in their marketing campaigns (figure 3.4). Even advertisements for bicycle lubricants pledged to their customers that their well-oiled wheels will fly “like a bird.”¹¹⁴ For those looking to “fly” even farther from the urban nucleus, touring groups and individual cyclists ventured deeper into the hinterland on lengthy excursions.

¹¹⁰ J.R. Morgan, “The Ubiquitousness of the Bicycle,” *New York City Metropolitan*, August 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

¹¹¹ “Good Word for Bicycling,” *New York Evening World*, June 19, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

¹¹² Arthur P.S. Hyde Diary, 1892-1896, New-York Historical Society, New York.

¹¹³ “The Pulpit and the Bicycle,” *Arena*, August 1895, xvii-xx.

¹¹⁴ Advertisement for 3inOne in *Fifty Miles Around New York*.

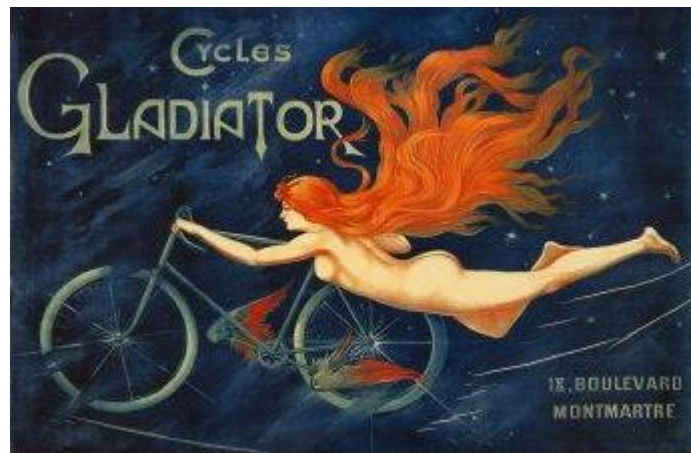
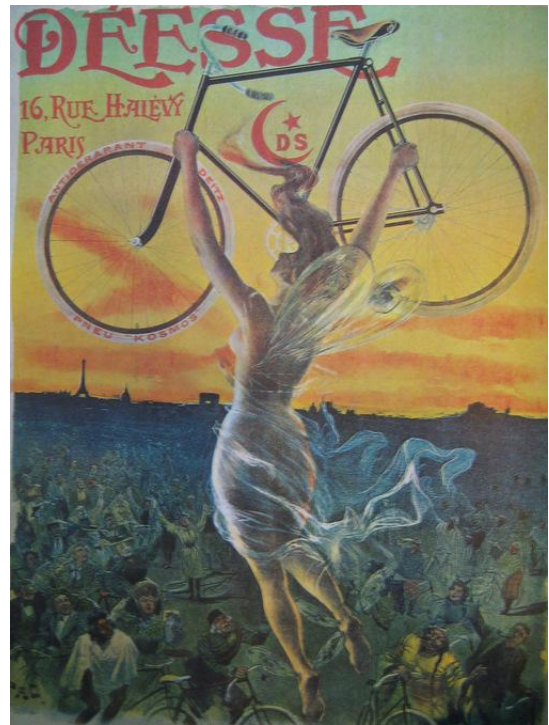


Figure 3.4: An advertisement for Columbia Bicycles (upper left), features a woman rider “flying” alongside birds. The other images, both from France, illuminate not only the colorful and artistic nature of many bicycle posters, but also highlight the notion of “flying.” Sources: Columbia Advertisement, *Good Housekeeping*, June 1898; Gladiator Poster, 1895; Deesse Poster, ca. 1897.

Vacationing and sight-seeing journeys had generally been out of the realm of possibility for a majority of Americans (even for those who owned a horse and carriage, traveling significant distances often proved too cumbersome for leisure), but by the end of the nineteenth century, with leisure time increased, an ever-expanding middle class, improved roads, and swifter and cheaper means of transportation, more and more city dwellers traveled farther and farther away from home. Although it would not be until the democratization of the automobile that vacationing and tourism became a mainstay of American culture, in the 1890s tens of thousands of cyclists did indeed pedal their way on long-distance adventures.

More than a few cyclists spent months traveling across the continent, and even the globe, in feats of strength and endurance that captured the public's imagination.¹¹⁵ But more commonly, small groups of urban cyclists packed their bags for a weekend or maybe even a week-long trip. Some set a course for a far-away metropolis, others for the hinterland.¹¹⁶ Joseph Bliss, a regular rider from the San Francisco area, took trips to Petaluma, Santa Rosa, Sausalito, Napa, and San Jose, always remembering to stop every 15 miles for some rest, supper, cigars, or beer.¹¹⁷ Still others toured historical sites, soaking up historical remnants atop their futuristic machines. Civil War sites, one buff recounted, could easily be toured and experienced via the wheel.¹¹⁸ Sightseeing and long-distance travel via bicycle had become popular enough that a crop of urban cycling clubs emerged, catering to these very activities, while guidebooks designed for urban

¹¹⁵ In 1884, Thomas Stevens began what was probably the first and certainly the most famous globetrotting journey. He followed the trip with a series of books detailing his journey. See for example, Thomas Stevens, *Around the World on a Bicycle, Volume II: From Teheran to Yokohama* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1889). Years later, other cyclists, including the first female rider, made similar journeys. See, Peter Zheutlin, *Around the World on Two Wheels: Annie Londonberry's Extraordinary Ride* (New York: Citadel, 2007).

¹¹⁶ For two examples of cycling diaries documenting bicycle tours, see F.C. Wildes, *Copied Diary of a Bicycle Trip, July 7 to August 30, '99*, Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois; H.A. Hersey, 1892 Diary, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts.

¹¹⁷ Joseph Bliss, *Bicycle Routes*: ms. S, 1894-1903, Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley;

¹¹⁸ J. Parmly Paret, *The Woman's Book of Sports: A Practical Guide to Physical Development and Outdoor Recreation* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1901), 83-86.

riders gave tips on how to prepare for a multi-day journey out of the city. The manuals included information about selecting luggage and packing efficiently, inspecting bicycles, finding a good companion, and choosing what to wear, where to ride, and even “how to breathe.”¹¹⁹ And roadside rest stops, often called a “Wheelmen’s Rest,” “Cycler’s Rest,” or a “Wheeler’s Retreat” (figure 3.5), much like the ones popularized in later years for automobile drivers, provided food, drink, and respite for traveling cyclists.



Figure 3.5: Pictured above is a fairly typical “Wheelmen’s Rest.” This roadhouse catered to San Francisco cyclists taking excursions outside the city. Source: Villa Miramar Rest, on the Great Highway in Roy D. Graves Pictorial Collection Bancroft Library, Berkeley.

¹¹⁹ For example, one New York City club was dubbed the New York Tourist Wheelmen. “News of the Wheelmen,” *New York Times*, April 19, 1892; *Fifty Miles Around New York*; Pope Manufacturing Company, *Tourists' Manual and Book of Information of Value to all Bicyclers* (Boston: Pope Manufacturing Co., 1892); Luther Henry Porter, *Cycling for Health and Pleasure: An Indispensable Guide to the Successful Use of the Wheel* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1896), 58.

Although these tourists, like so many in Gilded Age cities, romanticized nature and the wilderness, their expeditions were not without modern comforts. Cyclists demanded paved roads on which to explore the “natural” countryside, amenities, hotels, restaurants, maps, and, of course, their bicycle—an urban machine, produced in a factory and representative of technological might.¹²⁰ The goal of the trip, though, was to experience the antithesis of urbanity—the natural beauty and wonder so glaringly missing from urban life. As one such cycling explorer explained:

To wheel quietly up and down hill and across the valley, miles away from so-called civilization, and yet knowing that with a good bicycle miles mean but little; to wheel along drinking in the perfumes of the morning with the songs of the birds, and at even, thankful for the matchless glow in the west and the music of the cow-bells; to wheel silently at sunset into some peaceful village where your guide-book bids you expect a welcome—and at reduced rates—all this is worth celebrating.¹²¹

The practice of bicycle touring increased in popularity so rapidly throughout the 1890s that by 1897 Kodak developed a new device aimed at this growing segment of riders. The “Bicycle Kodak,” marketed toward urban dwellers who longed to remember the “quaint inn” in which they stayed and the “green fields” and “quiet cattle” by which they rode, was a lightweight camera designed for bicycle tours into the country.¹²² (figure 3.6) Combining the hobbies of photography and cycling, both of which flourished in the 1890s, tourists, sometimes members of camera clubs, sometimes members of bicycle clubs, sometimes members of cycling camera clubs, and sometimes just ordinary urbanites, escaped the city in pursuit of snapping a

¹²⁰ Gary Allan Tobin, “The Bicycle Boom of the 1890’s: The Development of Private Transportation and the Birth of the Modern Tourist,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 7, no.4 (Spring 1974): 845; Micahel R. Fein, *Paving the Way: New York Road Building and the American State, 1880-1956* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 28.

¹²¹ Hubert, Jr., “The Bicycle: The Wheel of To-Day,” 702.

¹²² Eastman Kodak Company, *Bicycle Kodaks* (Rochester: Eastman Kodak Co., 1897), 1-2; Advertising Supplement, *Review of Reviews*, June 1896, 62. See also, Kenneth I. Helphand, “The Bicycle Kodak,” *Environmental Review* 4, no. 3 (1980): 24-33.

portrait of nature.¹²³ Indeed, city cyclists relished bringing back to the city images of an anti-urban landscape or historical site, providing a permanent reminder of a simpler place or a simpler time.¹²⁴



Figure 3.6: Eastman Kodak Company, *Bicycle Kodaks* (New York: Eastman Kodak Company, 1897), 26.

Although the bicycle afforded a new kind of independence and mobility unrivaled by other forms of transportation, many cyclists depended on several forms of transportation and often combined means of transportation on longer trips. For example, cyclists might take a ferry or railroad to a distant location where they could then ride around an exotic place that might have been unreachable by bicycle.¹²⁵ Since bicycles were relatively lightweight, riders could easily carry them on boats and trains. This practice was so popular that on one Sunday in 1896 some 38,000 cyclists boarded ferries leaving Manhattan for a ride out in the country. Furthermore, over the course of a three and one half hour window on a Saturday in July 1897, the Long Island

¹²³ William R. Taylor, *In Pursuit of Gotham: Culture and Commerce in New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 30. See also, Zachary Mooradian Furness, *One Less Car: Bicycling and the Politics of Automobility* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 41.

¹²⁴ For example, see Arthur P.S. Hyde Diary, 1892-1896, 66, New-York Historical Society, New York.

¹²⁵ Oftentimes guidebooks aimed at urban cyclists included information about local ferries and railroads. See, for example, *Good Roads Book and the Rules of the Road Magazine*, 1898.

Railroad reported that it carried 20,000 New Yorkers out to Long Island, 25 percent of whom brought their bicycles.¹²⁶

Ferries and railroads often provided a quicker and sometimes the only way to travel, but they lacked the flexibility of the bicycle. Described by an avid cyclist, “You have no time-tables to conform to, and, with your baggage all on your wheel, you can change plans at a moment’s notice. You can go where the tourists seldom go and stop where they never stop. You can be as active or as lazy as you like. In fact, you can ramble and roam more easily on a bicycle than by any other conveyance.”¹²⁷ There was something more personal about touring via the bicycle. Riders could enjoy a closeness with the places they visited that was simply inconceivable “from the window of the railway carriage.”¹²⁸ As one British cyclist wrote about touring in that country, but which could have equally applied to the United States, “... you may choose out your own path, and need be trammled by no time-tables, and oppressed with no unreasonable companions. There are a thousand quaint, old-fashioned spots to visit, and unexpected recesses to which no railway has yet penetrated in this land of ours.”¹²⁹ Cyclists cherished that the bicycle afforded an unrivaled intimacy with nature and an unrivaled mode of personal transport.

Aside from trips to the countryside, some cycling tourists visited other urban centers.

Long-distance riders traveled between Boston, New York, Washington, D.C., and Chicago, but more often cyclists from smaller cities would ride into their nearest, large metropolis for a day

¹²⁶ *New York City Army and Naval Journal*, June 20, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York; “The Long Island Railroad Broke a Record on Saturday,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, July 6, 1897; “Transporting Bicycles,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, January 16, 1898. The issue of carrying bicycles as baggage on railroads was controversial and oft debated in the period. See, for example, Isaac B. Potter, “The Bicycle Outlook,” *The Century Magazine*, September, 1896, 788-789. Many states, though, mandated that railroads carry bicycles as baggage, without extra charge. See, for example, *Good Roads Book and the Rules of the Road Magazine*, 1898, 27.

¹²⁷ Winfred Ernest Garrison, *Wheeling through Europe* (St. Louis: Christian Publishing Company, 1900), 109-111 as quoted in Duncan R. Jamieson, “Bicycle Touring in the Late Nineteenth Century,” in *Cycle History 12: Proceedings of the 12th International Cycling History Conference, San Remo, Italy, September 2001* (San Francisco: Van der Plas, 2002).

¹²⁸ J. & E. R. Pennell, “Twenty Years of Cycling,” *The Fortnightly Review*, August 1, 1897, 190.

¹²⁹ E.H. Lacon Watson, “Bicycle Tours—and a Moral,” *Westminster Review*, July to December 1894, 171.

tour.¹³⁰ Local papers, like the *New York Evening Journal*, printed suggested routes for cycling tourists and a list of the major attractions and sights, while bicycle shops invited visitors to have their wheels valeted, cleaned, or repaired.¹³¹ As a whole, though, tourists on urban sight-seeing trips and cyclists engaged in super-distance rides represented a select minority. The vast majority of cyclists already lived within cities and had neither the time, nor the resources, nor the desire to cycle around the world. Instead, most recreational cycling trips emanated from the urban core, with riders taking a short ride after work, in the morning, or on the weekend. For even shorter trips to nature, cyclists enjoyed, and helped fuel, the growing, and shifting, municipal park movement.

The growth of the urban parks movement resulted from the increasing popularity of the doctrine of moral environmentalism, which preached that better living conditions spawned better people, and the back-to-nature movement, which advocated that the natural environment was particularly well suited for developing a moral and healthy citizenry. In the 1890s, as an urge for recreation and nature swept the urban populace, the increase in cycling grew in tandem with the expansion of park space. Although municipal parks might have been relegated to a square and constrained by existing urban development, and although the spaces often contained but man-made imitations of nature, parks offered a quick change of scenery. For those who could not fully escape the city's bounds, park designers sought to place "rural recreation," as Frederick Law Olmsted explained, squarely within the urban realm.¹³² Urban parks were, as one historian

¹³⁰ League of American Wheelmen, *New York State Division, Tour Book: New York State Division, League of American Wheelmen* (Cortland, N.Y.: Standard Press, 1895).

¹³¹ "Cycling Parades," *New York Evening Journal*, October 19, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

¹³² Frederick Law Olmsted to R.P. Hammond, Jr., October 5th, 1886 in Board of Park Commissioners, *The Development of Golden Gate Park* (San Francisco: Bacon & Company, 1886), 22. For more on the philosophy behind the growing parks movement and Olmsted's influence in it see, Thomas Bender, *Toward an Urban Vision: Ideas and Institutions in Nineteenth Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975).

wrote, “consciously designed and created to be the country within the city.”¹³³ Doing so, a park advocate argued in 1897, was to counterbalance all of the evils associated with city living: “The use of public parks is to promote the well-being and happiness of the people, to alleviate the hard conditions of crowded humanity, to encourage out-door recreations and intimacy with nature, to fill the lungs of tired workers from city factories and shops with pure and wholesome air.”¹³⁴ Although the benefits of city parks were becoming well known, and although small parks had become an important feature of city design for several decades, it was in the waning years of the nineteenth century, as sprawl and suburbanization distanced the urban nucleus from the more natural periphery, as urban population densities grew, as pollution worsened, as health consciousness rose, and as generally more and more urbanites became alienated from nature, that urban parks expanded mightily in scope. Advocates hoped that these parks could alleviate the escalating problem of city life—that is that urban life was filled with artificiality and that the city had become too separated from nature and the therapy it offered. The nostalgic/bucolic names of some city streets and urban restaurants were the only reminders of the natural wonders that had once sat in areas now filled with tall buildings, crowded streets, steel, iron, and asphalt.¹³⁵

In stark contrast to many of the formal gardens in Europe, the new American parks featured nature at its finest. Rolling hills, open spaces, and zigzagging paths, intended to serve as a counterpoise to the gridiron layout of many city streets, characterized late-nineteenth-century American parks.¹³⁶ The increasing amount of space dedicated to parks reflected a heightened awareness of the need to bring nature within the city’s fold. The municipal park system in

¹³³ David Schuyler, *The New Urban Landscape: The Redefinition of City Form in Nineteenth-Century America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 36.

¹³⁴ *First Report of the Park and Outdoor Art Association* (Louisville Kentucky, 1897), 22.

¹³⁵ Gunther Barth, *City People: The Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 37.

¹³⁶ Schultz, *Constructing Urban Culture*, 155-156.

Cleveland, Ohio, for example, increased its total park acreage from 93 to 1,500 acres from 1890 to 1905, while Los Angeles, which could claim a mere half-dozen acres in 1880 possessed 3,700 acres of public park space by 1905.¹³⁷ For decades, European cities had boasted the largest and most appealing parks, but with the United States urban park movement in full swing, American urban parks quickly outshined their European rivals.¹³⁸

The acres of sprawling fields of green and miles of winding paths that emerged in American cities in the 1890s represented something quite different than the older city parks that had been woven into the urban fabric. With cyclists promoting their growth and dominating their patronage, bicycles helped to cement the park as an integral piece of the cityscape, while contributing to a new urban park aesthetic and environment—one that continued to appreciate the value of natural splendor, but that also recognized the place for active recreation and exercise. Early city parks, once the quiet refuge for the well-to-do, gradually evolved into popular spots for recreation and the home to a sporting crowd. Although some notable parks, including New York’s Central Park, had begrudgingly afforded access to cyclists in the 1880s, only a select group of riders were allowed to use the parks. Central Park and Prospect Park, for instance, initially limited access to only uniform-wearing, badge-donning, cycling club members.¹³⁹ In this earlier era, as bicycles represented a luxury good in the extreme, park-going cyclists often derived from a similar milieu as those who rode around in their elegant carriages. But when cycling exploded in popularity in the 1890s and attracted a mass following, armies of cyclists overwhelmed city parks. On a pleasant spring Sunday in Cleveland in 1896, for example, nearly 15,000 bicycle riders rode through Cleveland Park, outnumbering pedestrians

¹³⁷ Schmidt, *Back to Nature*, 70.

¹³⁸ Teaford, *The Unheralded Triumph*, 252.

¹³⁹ “Concessions to Bicycle Riders,” *New York Times*, June 17, 1883; *Twenty-Fifth Annual Report of the Brooklyn Park Commissioners: for the Year 1885* (Brooklyn: Printed for the Commissioners, 1886), 40-41.

and easily outnumbering, by a three to one margin, the number of carriages that wheeled down the park's main drive.¹⁴⁰ In Brooklyn also, several thousand cyclists rode across the rolling hills of Prospect Park each day; in Philadelphia 136,813 bicycles enjoyed the sprawling Fairmount Park in a single month in 1897 (it was not unusual to see twenty-five bicycles for every one carriage); and cyclists dominated Chicago's park drives as well.¹⁴¹ Because of the bicycle, a writer for *Forum* reasoned, "Never before in the history of man have the public parks of cities been so truly breathing places of the people as they are now."¹⁴²



Figure 3.7: This photo was taken in Prospect Park, Brooklyn on a Sunday in the Spring of 1896. Source: *Munsey's Magazine*, May 1896, 137.

¹⁴⁰ *Third Annual Report of the Board of Park Commissioners of the City of Cleveland, 1895* (Cleveland, 1896), 27.

¹⁴¹ *Thirty-Fifth Annual Report of the Department of Parks of the City of Brooklyn for the year 1895* (New York, 1895), 129-130; *Thirty-Sixth Annual Report of the Department of Parks of the City of Brooklyn the Second of the County of Kings for the year 1896* (Brooklyn, 1897), 208; "Twas an Ideal Day for Cyclers," *Philadelphia Press*, August 31, 1896 in *Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs*, New-York Historical Society, New York; *L.A.W. Bulletin and Good Roads Magazine*, May 14, 1897; "Yields to the Wheel," *Chicago Tribune*, July 26, 1896.

¹⁴² Bishop, "Social and Economic Influence of the Bicycle," 680-691.



Figure 3.8: Prospect Park in 1897. Notice the three bicycles, which, presumably, brought a few of the park-goers for an afternoon of recreation. Source: *Thirty-Sixth Annual Report of the Department of Parks* (1897).



Figure 3.9: This drawing depicts Riverside Park in 1895 and also features (in the lower right corner) an example of the notorious scorcher. Source: Riverside Drive NY Reproduction in *Harper's Weekly*, June 15, 1895, of drawing by W. A. Rogers. Riverside Park, NY.

Not everyone, though, welcomed the whizzing bicycles. Since Central Park's creators had imagined their park as a quiet refuge, providing "a relief and counterpoise to the urban conditions" and offering an ideal setting for the "quiet contemplation of natural scenery," park policies continued, as the historians Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar have shown, to favor "mental relaxation over physical exertion."¹⁴³ Even though nineteenth-century city parks allowed certain forms of exercise, officials circumscribed those areas of activity. Ice skating, for example, was often promoted as a park activity, but it was spatially restricted to a single, confined lake. Instead, croquet and boating were encouraged because they maintained the tranquility of the parks. Horseback riding and carriage driving were a regular sight, but more often than not, the horses trotted at a pace not much faster than walking. Yet, in the 1890s, thousands and thousands of bicycles zoomed around city parks.

Even though many parks, including Central Park, contained winding, hilly drives meant not only to mimic the curves of nature, but also to discourage carriage drivers from speeding through the park, there was little the park commissioners could do to slow the cyclists who quickly overwhelmed these once tranquil spaces.¹⁴⁴ In Chicago, the Lincoln Park Commissioners resorted to Jeffersonian terms in declaring that the bicycle posed a threat "to the peace of mind and safety of body" and, in the process, to the park-goers "pursuit of happiness."¹⁴⁵ Indeed, across the country, park commissioners cited an increase in the number of traffic accidents and speeding bicycles. Nevertheless bicycle use continued to increase and, as a result, urban parks continued to evolve as sites for exercise and sporting recreation as much as simple respite.

¹⁴³ Olmsted to Hammond, Jr., October 5th, 1886 in Board of Park Commissioners, *The Development of Golden Gate Park*, 22; Schuyler, *The New Urban Landscape*, 6; Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 251.

¹⁴⁴ Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *The Park and the People*, 244.

¹⁴⁵ George D. Bushnell "When Chicago Was Wheel Crazy" in Steven A. Riess and Gerald R. Gems, eds., *The Chicago Sports Reader: 100 Years of Sports in the Windy City* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 89.

It had only been in the 1880s when Boston opened the country's first "recreation ground" inviting locals to run or play sports.¹⁴⁶ But with the enormous popularity of the bicycle—perhaps the most representative symbol of the new middle-class' obsession with exercise, nature, and the strenuous life—park commissioners could hardly ignore their prime constituents and begrudgingly accepted a change in the "nature" of urban parks, accommodating vigorous physical exercise and athletics. Several cities even went so far as to erect bicycle tracks inside their public parks for racers to speed around or for everyday park goers to use for exercise.¹⁴⁷

In the mid-1890s, Hartford welcomed five new parks into its fold. Although park officials sought to "exclude the sights and sounds of the street" in order to provide solace and promote relaxation, they relented by permitting vehicular travel (including bicycles) and active forms of recreation.¹⁴⁸ Perhaps they had no choice. The benefactor of the eponymous and cycling-friendly Pope Park was none other than the Colonel himself. The bicycle tycoon who donated the ninety-plus acres of parkland and who had, many years earlier, personally financed the legal campaigns to permit cycling in urban parks, would surely not have had it any other way.

Doctors, journalists, artists and cyclists (of course, in this period, many doctors, journalists, artists were themselves cyclists) equally recognized the health benefits of a trip to the countryside or a city park. The value of these pastoral explorations ran two ways: access to the

¹⁴⁶ Barth, *City People*, 39.

¹⁴⁷ *San Francisco Municipal Reports For the Fiscal Year 1889-90* (San Francisco: W.M. Hinton & Co. Printers, Published by Order of the Board of Supervisors, 1890); *Cycling Record Book, Season 1898*, Siegel, Cooper and Company, *Compliments of the Big Store* (Cleveland: Cooper and Company, 1898); Arnold, Schwinn & Co., *Fifty Years of Schwinn-Built Bicycles: The Story of the Bicycle and its Contributions to Our Way of Life* (Chicago: Arnold, Schwinn & Co., 1945), 47; Stephen Hardy, *How Boston Played: Sport, Recreation, and Community, 1865-1915* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1982), 147.

¹⁴⁸ Baldiwn, *Domesticating the Street*, 121-134

open-air and scenery absent in the city, but also the exercise itself—each of which promised its own set of physical and mental health benefits. Indeed, the new appreciation for the wilderness coincided with an increased desire for active recreation, adventure, sports, and physical exercise.¹⁴⁹ Exercising for the sake of exercising was a relatively new phenomenon in the late nineteenth century, as only a decade before the popularization of the bicycle, few Americans exercised. But as the turn of the century approached, the medical community began to endorse exercise with greater conviction. Gymnasiums peppered the urban landscape. So did YMCAs, emblematic of the new doctrine of “muscular Christianity,” which preached that athletics, recreation, and competition could instill character.¹⁵⁰ Healthy people were good people; strength equaled morality.¹⁵¹ Also, some men, perhaps distressed by the loss of independence, cultural paradigm shifts, and changing gender relations that came with the rise of industrialization and urbanization, became, as the historian Gail Bederman explained, “unusually obsessed with manhood.”¹⁵² In part because of the increase in leisure time, mass consumption, sedentary jobs, and the fact that the fiery battles of the Civil War had extinguished so long ago, some men, in what has been described as an era of “over civilization,” displayed a heightened need to display their manliness. To demonstrate their virility some took up boxing or football, others lifted weights, and, to a lesser extent, some rode bicycles. Nevertheless, the age when bicycles, by attracting a nearly all-male following and requiring expert riders who could mount the high wheelers, blatantly connoted manliness was long gone. Women had also become riders.

¹⁴⁹ John Higham, “The Reorientation of American Culture in the 1890’s,” 26-45.

¹⁵⁰ Elliott J. Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America* (Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 1986), 179-180.

¹⁵¹ As but one example, advocates argued that through physical activity, and specifically cycling, urban vices would decline. As one writer reasoned “The healthier men are, the better they are; and in so far as the bicycle makes for health it indirectly diminishes the cause of crime.” C. Lombroso, “The Bicycle and Crime,” *The Pall Mall Magazine*, 1900, 31.

¹⁵² Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization*, 11-15.

For women especially, the subject of cycling for exercise was widely discussed in the 1890s. Detractors warned of muscular fatigue, poor posture, and a myriad of other ailments that the “fairer” sex unavoidably succumbed to after prolonged trips atop “the wheel.” Some doctors fretted over the “unavoidable stimulation” resultant from the friction between the lady rider and the saddle. The persistent stimulation, one doctor cautioned, weakened a woman’s “power of resistance” and inevitably led to nymphomania, prostitution, and bastards. Dr. Cooper’s conclusion equating sexual proclivity with cycling was not, however, widespread. A colleague countered that “the young woman with a pure mind...can come to no harm from bicycle riding.” More than being innocuous, he continued, the bicycle has actually done women much good. These views represented two ends of the spectrum as most medical authorities came to recommend cycling for women, albeit in modest doses.¹⁵³

Riding modestly meant not riding for too long, but also riding at acceptable speeds. The thrill of riding could be, however, too great for anyone to curb. “You might as well tell a girl to go to a ball room, and not dance” Dr. Gihon advised, “as to tell her to ride a bicycle and not ride fast.”¹⁵⁴ Nevertheless, a plethora of doctors came to prescribe the bicycle for urban women as many of the universal health benefits of cycling and exercise in general (e.g., counteracting a sedentary lifestyle, bringing people outdoors) applied doubly for women. Summed up by a doctor/cycling advocate: “the bicycle will do more, under the proper conditions, to renovate the health of women than any invention of the times.”¹⁵⁵ Other doctors elucidated that the advantages transcended merely physical benefits. When a woman rode a bicycle, one such physician described, “her mind is taken off of those things which have a tendency to perplex and

¹⁵³ C.C. Cooper, “The Result of Bicycle Riding Among Women and Girls,” *The St. Louis Clinique: A Monthly Journal of Clinical Medicine and Surgery*, November 1891, 576-578; “It has Two Sides” *St. Louis Clinique*, 609-610; “Women, Girls, and Bicycles,” *New York Times*, May 21, 1893.

¹⁵⁴ Gihon, “The Bicycle as a Sanitary Measure,” 53.

¹⁵⁵ *L.A.W. Bulletin and Good Roads*, February 10, 1899.

madden.” The result, he pointed out, was “an uncommonly happy, bright, and exhilarated set of faces which we see spinning down our streets.”¹⁵⁶

Still, many fretted over the dangers of cycling for both men and women who exercised too strenuously. The supposed consequences varied from an array of long-lasting ailments to the development of poor posture. Back and neck injuries, in particular, were the most common concern. Explaining the dangers, a doctor alleged that a great many riders “contorted and distorted into hideous caricature of the shape of man—a creature doubled upon itself, crouching as if in fear, its face peering intently and anxiously, with contracted brows, compressed lips, pallid cheeks, and restless eyes.”¹⁵⁷ The many other supposed bicycle-related maladies included: “bicycle hump, pop eye, bicycle neck, bicycle foot, and bicycle face.”¹⁵⁸

In different ways, bicycles both helped to usher in, and benefited in popularity from, the new doctrine of physical exercise. At a Sanitary Convention held in Detroit in 1897, one member regretted that “within the last score of years a regular systematic physical exercise was practiced but slightly by our men and women.” Now, however, thanks to the bicycle, described as the greatest device “conducive to physical development,” all that was changing.¹⁵⁹ Similarly, “The evolution of the bicycle,” Dr. Hammond, a prominent physician declared in 1896, “is probably the greatest factor which has influenced the spread of the doctrine of physical culture in this century.”¹⁶⁰ And yet another doctor, also in 1896, remarked that it was because of the

¹⁵⁶ Gihon, “The Bicycle as a Sanitary Measure,” 54.

¹⁵⁷ Gihon, “The Bicycle as a Sanitary Measure,” 47-48.

¹⁵⁸ “A Word for the Wheel,” *New York City Home Journal*, July 1, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York; Theodore R. MacClure, “Bicycling: From a Healthful Standpoint,” *Physician and Surgeon*, October 1898, 449-454; “Cycling and Health,” *Bicycling World*, December 21, 1894. For a poem about scorching cyclists that emphasized the dangerous shape that speeding cyclists contorted their bodies into see, Newt Newkirk, “The Man with the Hump,” *L.A.W. Bulletin and Good Roads*, August, 1899, 56.

¹⁵⁹ MacClure, “Bicycling: From Social, Business, and Healthful Standpoints,” 114. See also, “The Point of View,” *Scribner’s Magazine*, February, 1896, 256.

¹⁶⁰ “Recommended by Dr. Hammond,” *New York Times*, January 5, 1896.

extraordinary popularity of cycling that “thousands upon thousands of men and women who previous to a year or so ago never got any out-door exercise to speak of are now devoting half of their leisure time to healthy recreation.”¹⁶¹ While their claims may have exaggerated the facts, these three physicians represent but a small sampling of the sizeable group who came to thank the bicycle for sparking an exercise revolution. That revolution and the benefits that would come with physical recreation were particularly valuable to those most lacking physical activity, meaning, as a cyclist and physician observed in 1897, those who lived in America’s cities. The bicycle, he hailed, provided “what had long been a want, an exercise that would benefit the masses; it let fresh air lave bodies that had been long confined in-doors; it encouraged women as well as men to go, not only out of doors, but out of towns, and it infused into the mind new scenes and new thoughts.”¹⁶²

The benefits to those newly active city dwellers were too many to count. Cycling exercised its rider’s heart, lungs, back, chest, abdomen, and legs while providing, as one physician described, “mental refreshment” in a unique combination benefiting both “the mind and the body.”¹⁶³ That double dose of mental and physical well-being was widely described as cycling’s greatest gift. Since it “combines physical exercise and mental and nervous exercise,” a bicycle cheerleader noted, it was the perfect remedy for three of the most significant causes of poor health among city workers: too little fresh air, too little physical activity, and excessive mental fatigue.¹⁶⁴

As a prescription for mental and physical health, the bicycle was conceived as not just an invaluable vehicle, but also as an invaluable contributor to the health of humanity. In fact, the

¹⁶¹ “The Bicycle Fever,” *The Times* (Richmond), June 4, 1896.

¹⁶² Richardson, *Vita Medica*, 246.

¹⁶³ “Recommended by Dr. Hammond,” *New York Times*, January 5, 1896

¹⁶⁴ Porter, *Cycling for Health and Pleasure*, 13-15.

bicycle could allegedly cure almost any disorder. “It will soon be difficult to mention an ailment whose victims, provided they are not bedridden, may not, in somebody’s opinion, derive benefit from the use of the bicycle,” the *New York Medical Journal* noted in 1899.¹⁶⁵ In aggregate, physicians and the converted credited the machine with improving digestion; strengthening the heart and the liver; reducing or eliminating melancholia, rheumatism, gout, anemia, hernia, exhaustion, nervousness, aches, pains (and even homosexual desires); reducing fat; developing courage, independence, intellect, and muscles.¹⁶⁶ Those curative powers were just some of the many reasons the bicycle was regarded as an almost utopian instrument that could, if applied broadly, wield a utopian city.

In language that echoes, albeit in a different tone, modern notions of environmental sustainability, supporters argued that the bicycle would lay the foundation for healthier cities in the future by virtue of healthier people and a healthier race. With more cyclists, one advocate promised, “we would have a stronger race.”¹⁶⁷ Not alone, others proposed that cycling “adds joy and vigor to the dowry of the race” and that “the bicycle promises substantial improvement to our race.”¹⁶⁸ For women in particular, some witnessed that the bicycle was “daily impressing Spartan strength and grace, and more than Spartan intelligence, on the mothers of coming generations.”¹⁶⁹ In almost Darwinian language, promoters of cycling conceived that the physical strength and mental fortitude endowed by the great machine would have long-lasting, perhaps

¹⁶⁵ “The Bicycle for Persons with Hernia,” *New York Medical Journal*, April 29, 1899, 606.

¹⁶⁶ Ward, *The Common Sense of Bicycling*, 172; Frances E. Willard, *A Wheel Within a Wheel: How I Learned to Ride the Bicycle With Some Reflections By the Way* (Chicago: Woman’s Temperance Publishing Association, 1895), 55-56; MacClure, “Bicycling: From Social, Business, and Healthful Standpoints,” 115; J. West Roosevelt, “A Doctor’s View of Bicycling,” *Scribner’s Magazine*, June 1895, 707-709; Benjamin Ward Richardson, “What to Avoid in Cycling,” *North American Review*, August 1895, 179; Hammond, “The Bicycle in the Treatment of Nervous Diseases,” 37-46.

¹⁶⁷ “Future Bicycling,” *Bicycling World*, November 30, 1894, 16.

¹⁶⁸ Marguerite Merington, “Woman and the Bicycle,” *Scribner’s*, June 1895, 703; Lombroso, “The Bicycle and Crime,” 314-316.

¹⁶⁹ W. J. McGee, “Fifty Years of American Science,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 1898, 311-312.

even evolutionary, consequences. As one author foresaw: “For my part, I venture to predict that the real *cyclo-anthropos* of the twentieth century will suffer less from his nerves and will be more muscular than the man of the nineteenth century.”¹⁷⁰ Although these supporters were not conceiving of sustainability in terms of preserving the planet for the benefit of future generations, they did believe that the decisions they made now—exercising brain and body—would have repercussions on future generations. Strong mothers, fit fathers, and a resolute race awaited a future generation, bred, in part, by the bicycle.

In an era when health-consciousness deepened and bicycles were so widely accepted as a tool to relieve the stress of urban life and improve the health of its riders, bicycle promoters and manufacturers tailored their products toward that end. In many cases, bicycle manufacturers marketed their wares as not only practical vehicles and a means of recreation, but also as health products.¹⁷¹ Cycling advertisements and catalogues frequently referred to the advantages of exercise via the wheel and the medicinal effects, both physical and mental, of cycling trips (figures 3.10-3.11). A single 1893 catalog from the Pope Manufacturing Company advertising its Columbia bicycles included paragraphs of endorsements attesting to the healthy lifestyles led by Columbia devotees. As David Torrance, a lawyer, explained: “The brain and nerve tissue destroyed in exacting professional work, performed in ill-ventilated offices, or worse ventilated court rooms, must be recreated from time to time.” “Of all the instrumentalities fitted to do this,” he continued “none are superior to the bicycle,” which ensured its riders a “clear brain and quiet nerves.” H.W. Smith, a city businessman, concurred: “most sports and exercises in which our urban population indulge...are generally taken within the limits and confines of the town, and

¹⁷⁰ Lombroso, “The Bicycle and Crime,” 314-316.

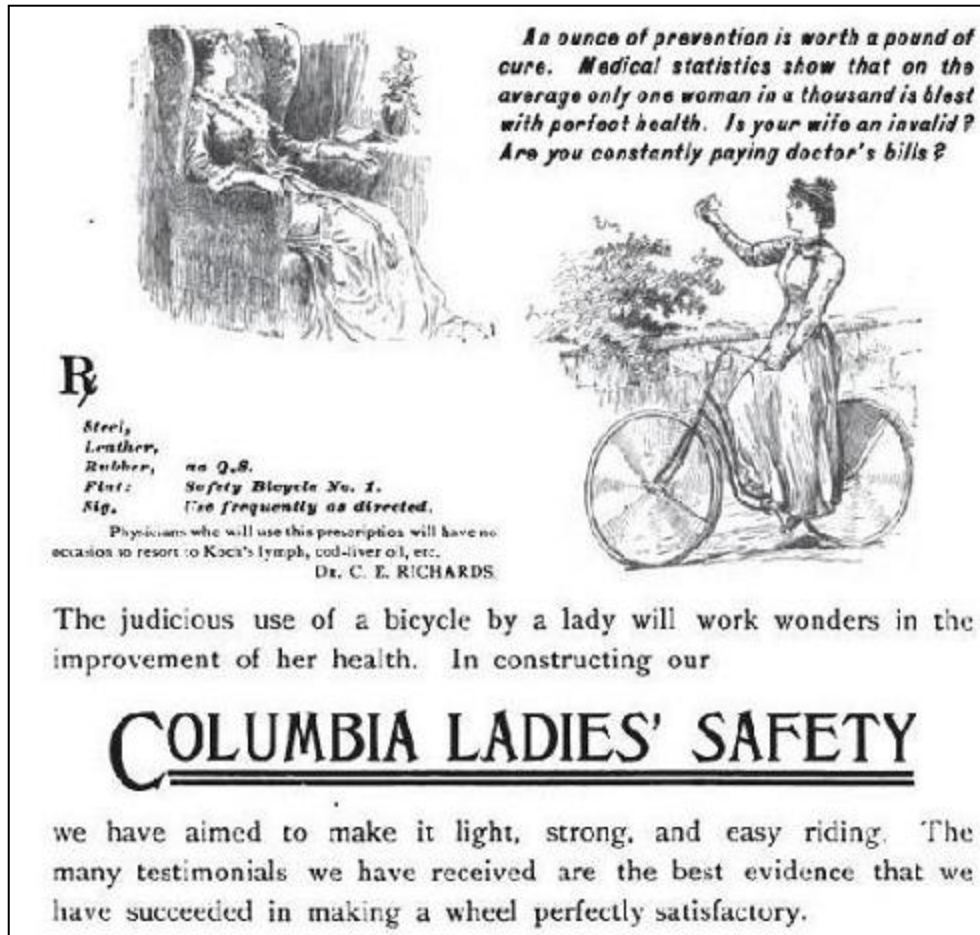
¹⁷¹ For more on how advertisers in this era tapped into the health consciousness of consumers see, T.J. Jackson Lears, “From Salvation to Self-Realization: Advertising and the Therapeutic Roots of the Consumer Culture, 1880-1930,” in Richard Wightman Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears, eds., *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983).

while in a degree they are beneficial, they can in no way compare with bicycling as a health-giving exercise.” Thankfully, though, “the wheel attracts its devotees beyond the limits of the town as naturally as the lake and river attract a flock of ducks.” Not to be outdone, John H. Watson, a clergyman, joined the choir of bicycle-endorsers when he described the calming effects of riding: “I have found it beneficial to my health in lifting off that burden of weariness that comes after brain effort, or nervous strain, or tiresome tramping in parochial work.”¹⁷² While these endorsements could easily be written off as marketing hogwash, ordinary cyclists and doctors in the 1890s regularly reported the same effects.



Figure 3.10: This advertisement for Monarch Bicycles highlights the notion that bicycles were seen as vehicles to promote better health. The ad promises that “An hour awheel with nature is the best tonic for the busy business man.” Not only did bicycles provide physical health, but the ad also claims that “Outdoor exercise broadens the mind and kills the worry.” Source: *Cosmopolitan*, April, 1901.

¹⁷² Pope Manufacturing Company, *Columbia Bicycle Catalog for 1893*, 46-48.



An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Medical statistics show that on the average only one woman in a thousand is blessed with perfect health. Is your wife an invalid? Are you constantly paying doctor's bills?

Rx
 Steel,
 Leather,
 Rubber, as Q.S.
 Flint: Safety Bicycle No. 1.
 Sig. Use frequently as directed.

Physicians who will use this prescription will have no occasion to resort to Koca's lymph, cod-liver oil, etc.
 Dr. C. E. RICHARDS

The judicious use of a bicycle by a lady will work wonders in the improvement of her health. In constructing our

COLUMBIA LADIES' SAFETY

we have aimed to make it light, strong, and easy riding. The many testimonials we have received are the best evidence that we have succeeded in making a wheel perfectly satisfactory.

Figure 3.11: An 1891 advertisement for Columbia Bicycles also published in *Cosmopolitan*, emphasizes cycling's health benefits specifically for women as two images, a before and after of a female cyclist, display the supposed benefits of riding. The ad also, in quite a different manner, speaks to a male audience as a portion of the text reads, "Is your wife an invalid? Are you constantly paying doctor's bills?" If so, the ad suggests, the solution is a Columbia. Source: *Cosmopolitan*, November, 1891.

In a separate, lengthy bicycle advertisement entitled, "How the Finest Bicycles Are Made," Pope's Columbia bicycles were said to offer a "healthful exercise of wheeling." Riding a Columbia, so the advertisement claimed, was "prescribed again and again for many of the city workers who are lured into sedentary habits and a physical breakdown."¹⁷³ Clearly, Pope, not unlike his competitors, realized that much of his customer-base was comprised of men and women who fretted about the debilitating effects of urban life. As the catalogs and

¹⁷³ "How the Finest Bicycles Are Made," *Review of Reviews* (advertising supplement), 1894, 19-20.

advertisements made clear, the bicycle was more than a vehicle. It was a prescription for better health.

Cycling manufacturers and marketers were not the only ones looking to cash in on the conviction that bicycles could remedy urbanity's insalubriousness. Among the many that touted cycling and especially bicycle trips into the fresh county air were health products companies. Accordingly, it was not uncommon for a health company to sponsor the cycling guidebooks, which offered suggested routes, maps, road conditions, and lists of cyclist-friendly hotels and restaurants. In just one example, the Pond's Extract Co., in 1897, published a thirty-two page pamphlet of "Twenty-Five Charming Trips" that delivered New Yorkers out of the city.¹⁷⁴ Sprinkled throughout the suggested routes were testimonials of Pond's Extract's curative properties. While the Extract could treat bloody noses and a host of other ills, the pastoral scenery of the countryside would provide the therapeutic release for city dwellers: a truly holistic combination.

The promise of the cycling city as a healthy city depended not only on a healthy population, who, thanks to cycling, received the benefits of frequent trips to the country, regular muscular exercise, and mental refreshment, but also on an improved urban environment. Clear skies, pure water, and proper sewerage could, many late-nineteenth-century Americans finally realized, promote a healthier and more sanitary city—and a healthier and more sanitary population.¹⁷⁵ Bicycles fit into the equation as well, albeit not in the same way as they would a century later. In

¹⁷⁴ Pond's Extract Co., *Cycling in the country. Twenty-Five charming Trips Combining Both Long and Short Runs through the Beautiful Regions Adjacent to New York* (New York: Pond's Extract Co., 1897).

¹⁷⁵ Schultz, *Constructing Urban Culture*, 112.

the nineteenth century, no one would have understood what a “carbon footprint” was, the significance of “CO₂ emissions,” or the implication of being “dependent on foreign-oil.” Nonetheless, a growing group of urban Americans, thanks to advances in the fields of science, engineering, and sanitation became increasingly aware of the dangers of pollution and the value of cleanliness.

Aside from preventing what had become semi-regular epidemics, clearing smoke-filled skies, and providing clean water to the masses, reformers put cleaning streets at the top of their list of environmental concerns. Under the umbrella of municipal and progressive reform, street improvement and its relationship to sanitation became a chief concern in the 1890s. With the great wave of industrialism came a great wave of pollution. Adulterated water fed, and thick air stagnated within, industrial cities. City streets too bore the evidence of pollution. Millions of horses in American cities meant millions of pounds of manure. (For example, 133 tons of horse manure fell in Milwaukee alone each day.¹⁷⁶) Horse carcasses lay sprawled across the cobblestones. Dirty steam engines pulled cars of people, emitting smoke all the way. Litter abounded. Wretched water stood still in pools.

The increase in urban pollution corresponded to an increase in municipal reform efforts and the acceptance of germ theory that placed a new emphasis on purifying America’s soot-filled cities. As the environmental historian Martin Melosi described, “By the late nineteenth century, the saturation of cities and suburbs with air, water, refuse, and noise pollution finally produced an environmental consciousness among the complacent citizenry. Until this time, almost everyone had ignored questions of environmental quality” and “had resigned themselves to pollution as an inconvenience to be endured.” But in the 1890s “the concern for health expanded into a broader environmental perspective, indicating that reformers were beginning to see

¹⁷⁶ Schultz, *Constructing Urban Culture*, 118.

pollution not simply as an irritant but as an unwanted by-product of industrialization.”¹⁷⁷ As a result, municipal engineers and reformers developed a fresh interest in purifying the urban environment. Some called for the elimination of horses, many of whom saw the bicycle as their savior.¹⁷⁸ Regardless, it was the effort to clean the streets, partly because most urbanites used the streets and witnessed their foulness every day, which emerged as a central plank in the larger campaign of environmental reform.

Cleaning streets involved armies of sweepers, brooms in hand. But even with a large labor force, city streets proved difficult to clean. Particularly, unpaved and uneven surfaces were ideal spaces for rotting rubbish to linger. With smooth, asphalted streets, however, decaying trash had nowhere to hide. As the Superintendent of Washington D.C.’s Street-Cleaning Department described, street cleaners had “to conquer dirt within, to slay in the inception the germ-breeding refuse with which the city is littered daily, in order that, through cleanliness, health shall be preserved, happiness intensified, and pride of streets and byways made to rank with pride of home and fireside.”¹⁷⁹ It was no easy task, but to ensure happiness, civic pride, and an environment that promoted morality, the D.C. Superintendent pleaded for more resources to pave and clean streets. Without paved streets it would be nearly impossible to “conquer” and “slay” the pollutants. The chief advocate, though, of the smooth-streets-equals-clean-streets campaign was the well-known Street Cleaning Commissioner for New York City. George E. Waring Jr., who, like his fellow Civil War veteran Albert Pope, retained the honorific title of Colonel, had

¹⁷⁷ Martin V. Melosi, *Effluent America: Cities, Industry, Energy, and the Environment* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001), 39, 58. For more background on nineteenth-century pollution and efforts toward environmental reform see, Joel A. Tarr, *The Search for the Ultimate Sink: Urban Pollution in Historical Perspective* (Akron: The University of Akron Press, 1996).

¹⁷⁸ Tarr, *The Search for the Ultimate Sink*, 323.

¹⁷⁹ *Annual Report of the Commissioners of the District of Columbia for the Year Ended June 30, 1898*. Vol. 1. (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1898), 461. These themes were echoed by many street commissioners and engineers in other cities. See, for example, N.P. Lewis, “From Cobblestones to Asphalt to Brick,” *Paving and Municipal Engineering*, April 1896, 232.

been a noted agriculturist and drainage engineer. With his enlarged corps of street sweepers, known affectionately as the “White Wings” for the sterile uniforms they donned, the Republican with an egg-shaped head and wispy moustache launched a frenzied campaign to clean the city’s streets.¹⁸⁰ To aid his effort, Waring enlisted the bicycle. Foremen wheeled across the city inspecting the roads and reporting on their cleanliness.¹⁸¹ He also set out on a three month tour of Europe, a month of which he spent atop a bicycle, exploring what he conceived of as urban laboratories in Germany, France, and Switzerland.¹⁸²

Waring recognized the value of bicycles, not only as practical vehicles for travel, but also for their effect on city streets. Because of the bicycle’s relatively light weight, cyclists riding along asphalt surfaces hardly wore down the pavement, thereby reducing the need for repaving. Moreover, quite simply, cyclists, through agitation, helped lay smooth surfaces and smooth surfaces ameliorated street pollution. As an Atlanta newspaper argued, “Perhaps it would not be entirely out of place...to designate the bicycle as the forerunner of good roads in this country and as an evangelist of a more progressive era than has ever been known before.”¹⁸³ Not to mention that bicycles promised to replace horses, a chief pollutant of the city. Waring, who in 1897 was an invited guest of the cycling arm of the New York Athletic Club and gave a speech entitled “Clean Street,” joined forces with local cyclists to improve city streets.¹⁸⁴ The Department of Street Cleaning and the local cycling organizations enjoyed such a cozy relationship and shared

¹⁸⁰ Martin V. Melosi, *The Sanitary City: Environmental Services in Urban America from Colonial Times to the Present* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2008), 121. For more on George E Waring, Jr. see, Daniel Eli Burnstein, *Next to Godliness: Confronting Dirt and Despair in Progressive Era New York City* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 32-55.

¹⁸¹ George E. Waring, Jr., “The Cleaning of a Great city,” *McClure’s Magazine*, September, 1897, 921.

¹⁸² “News of the Bicyclists,” *New York World*, June 20, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York; “Awheel in the Tyrol,” *New York Mail and Express*, September 30, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

¹⁸³ “The Bicycle as a Forerunner,” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 16, 1896.

¹⁸⁴ “Cyclists at Dinner,” *New York Times*, February 19, 1897.

such mutual aims that Waring instructed his street cleaners to take extra care in searching for and removing any objects “apt to throw a bicycle rider” from his machine.¹⁸⁵

Realizing the newly broad appeal of environmental reform, cyclists and cycling organizations like the L.A.W. incorporated the reduction of pollution and disease as a component of the “good roads” campaign. According to the L.A.W.’s publication, *Good Roads*, the new paving techniques had been designed to prevent pollution and “render the city sanitary.”¹⁸⁶ By replacing horses with bicycles, much of the filth that dirtied the streets, soured the air, and was believed to be the cause of much disease, could be rooted out. “Any observer can see that the filth incessantly deposited in the city streets is almost wholly due to animals,” a prominent journalist reported in 1892. “With the disappearance of this, a vast amount of disease produced by the microbes thus continually sent broadcast into the air will be prevented” and a terrific “benefit to health” imparted.¹⁸⁷

Bicycles tiptoeing around the city offered anti-noise advocates the promise of a quieter world.¹⁸⁸ Noise pollution, which by the end of the nineteenth century had also developed into something more than a nuisance, improved as asphalt replaced roughly-chopped granite blocks. The clip-clop of horses’ hooves and mechanical racket of engines could, perhaps, be no more. As a writer noted in 1892, urban transportation was the cause of excessive noise, but could also be the solution: “All but an insignificant percentage of the exasperating noise and confusion of city life proceeds from the harsh rattle and clatter of vehicles in the streets.” But with the popularity of cycling, “This will be entirely abated, and the main source of the nervousness that

¹⁸⁵ “Gossip of the Cyclers,” *New York Times*, May 22, 1898.

¹⁸⁶ Henry P. Morrison, “The Sidewalks of New York City,” *Good Roads Magazine*, February, 1904, 77; Fein, *Paving the Way*, 31

¹⁸⁷ Baxter, “Economic and Social Influences of the Bicycle,” 579-583.

¹⁸⁸ For more on the early campaigns against noise pollution see, Raymond W. Smilor, “Toward an Environmental Perspective: The Anti-Noise Campaign, 1893-1932” in Martin V. Melosi, ed., *Pollution and Reform in American cities, 1870-1930* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980).

so universally afflicts city dwellers, will disappear.”¹⁸⁹ Another journalist likewise predicted that in the future, utopian version of the cycling city “there will be a delicious silence to begin with. No lumbering vans, no banging omnibuses, no clattering of iron hoofs upon asphalt.”¹⁹⁰ The bicycle was, as a L.A.W. official bragged, “noiseless, clean and a non-consumer;”¹⁹¹ everything that the stinking, loud, and polluting horse was not. Unlike other vehicles, bicycles did not “consume” electricity or require horsepower, nor did they “consume” valuable urban space as did the elevateds and streetcar tracks, nor did they require any corporate investment. Cycling required almost no special infrastructure,¹⁹² emitted no pollutants or odors, and quietly rolled through the raucous city—attributes well appreciated by late-nineteenth-century Americans.

Aside from softening noise and reducing urban filth, paving and improving streets also served to boost civic pride and promote happy, healthy, and moral citizens. At a time when the City Beautiful movement was in its nascent stages, planners, city officials, and cyclists equally recognized the value of beautifying, which in many cases started with paving, the streets. One contemporary commentator equated picturesque roads with a healthy city: “the sight of a smooth, even road that winds along like a golden ribbon...brings the comforting thought to a native that his people are happy and prosperous, that there is well being where the road begins, where it ends and all along where it serpentine its way.”¹⁹³ Likewise, in a sermon on the value of cycling, a clergyman averred, “we wheelmen can have a great influence both patriotic and beneficial. By laboring for good streets and roads more than in any other way can we improve our own city as a place of residence and contribute directly to the happiness of our fellow-

¹⁸⁹ Baxter, “Economic and Social Influences of the Bicycle,” 579-583.

¹⁹⁰ “Unbounded Horseless Possibilities Opened Up,” *Toronto Truth*, August 8, 1896 in *Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs*, New-York Historical Society, New York.

¹⁹¹ “How Fool Driving Affects the Popularity of the Automobile,” *Outing*, February 1906, 664.

¹⁹² It should be noted that bicycle paths catered exclusively to cyclists and took up valuable space within the city. That said, cyclists could, and often did, ride through the city on the streets with other traffic and did not require special paths exclusively for their use.

¹⁹³ “Good Roads of France Her greatest Blessing,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, July 31, 1898.

men.”¹⁹⁴ Thus, advocates incorporated paving roads within the larger project of civic improvement and rendering the urban population more morally fit. As such, cyclists joined an array of urban reform agencies, including Chicago’s Hull House and New York’s Women’s Municipal League, both of which suggested that a clean city bred clean people by increasing personal hygiene and spreading the gospel of pride in oneself, character development, and proper decorum.¹⁹⁵ The notion that attractive, neatly organized space could mollify the hazards of urban life and uplift the crudest variety of urban residents gained significant acceptance by the end of the nineteenth century. Parks were meant to civilize and civic monuments to bestow beauty and order. Likewise, asphalt stretching across and beyond the city center was to beautify both the city and its people. With noiseless bicycles marching along silky roads “municipal greatness” and “civic well being” awaited.¹⁹⁶ As a municipal street engineer summed up: “there is nothing which goes further to make a city attractive as a place of residence, to foster a healthy public spirit and municipal pride...than well paved streets.”¹⁹⁷ Or, put in even simpler terms, “mean streets make mean people.”¹⁹⁸

Those clean streets that promoted clean, happy, and healthy people represented just one dimension of the bicycle’s health-inducing and city-reforming effects. Thanks to the bicycle, one environmental reformer credited, sanitation had been enhanced in nearly every dimension. “Personal health has improved; sanitary necessities in wayside inns and public-houses have been introduced; the home life has developed freer than before of disease and care, and outside games, so favourable to healthy life, have become the order of the day.”¹⁹⁹ Indeed, the changes wrought

¹⁹⁴ “The Pulpit and the Bicycle,” *Arena*, August 1895, xx.

¹⁹⁵ Baldwin, *Domesticating the Street*, 50-60.

¹⁹⁶ “The Passing Hour,” *Bicycling World*, January 25, 1895, 372.

¹⁹⁷ N.P. Lewis, “From Cobblestones to Asphalt to Brick,” *Paving and Municipal Engineering*, April 1896, 232.

¹⁹⁸ Charles Mulford Robinson, “The Sociology of a Street Layout” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 51, Housing and Town Planning (January 1914): 196.

¹⁹⁹ Richardson, *Vita Medica*, 246.

were already substantial, but they paled in comparison to those that awaited the future. Visionaries dreamed of future, utopian cities where the benefits of cycling multiplied across the urban ecosystem. Colonel Waring, of street-sweeping fame, wrote a fantastical essay describing New York, a century later, in the year 1997. The bicycle-loving sanitarian dreamed of a world, of course, absent of horses and filled with brilliantly polished streets.²⁰⁰ A contemporary of Waring's and a well-known physician and sanitarian dreamt of his own utopia. "Hygeia" was a sanitary paradise void of filth and disease and created by an avid cyclist who anticipated that cyclists would themselves pedal the development of cleaner, health-inducing cities.²⁰¹ Indeed, so many of the great visionaries and planners, reformers and thinkers, found that the bicycle offered seemingly endless opportunities.

That city living wreaked havoc on its peoples' health was a widespread belief. Bicycle manufacturers, doctors, reformers, public health advocates, and cycling promoters uniformly came to realize that late-nineteenth-century Americans held deep reservations about living in large cities. Cities, for many justifiable reasons, became labeled as not only breeding grounds for disease and pollution—air, noise, and water—but also as breeding grounds for a diseased people. The twin forces of industrialization and urbanization yielded a sedentary, exercise-starved, and nature-deprived race of urban dwellers. Perhaps then, it is not so surprising that bicycles, which offered to remedy these limits of an urban lifestyle, attained such a large following and earned the praises of doctors who lauded the machines as the "great callisthenic of

²⁰⁰ Stanley K. Schultz and Clay McShane, "To Engineer the Metropolis: Sewers, Sanitation, and City Planning in Late-Nineteenth-Century America," *Journal of American History* 65, no. 2 (September 1978): 389-411.

²⁰¹ Benjamin Ward Richardson, *Hygeia: A City of Health* (1876); Benjamin Ward Richardson, *Vita Medica*. See also, James C. Whorton, "The Hygiene of the Wheel: An Episode in Victorian Sanitary Science," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 52, no.1 (Spring 1978): 61.

the world” and the most important device to encourage physical health.²⁰² With great ease and speed, urban riders exercised their muscles, calmed their nerves, and found solace amid a quieter setting. Thus, the once (both physically and mentally) distant state of “the countryside” was, with a bicycle, now within practical reach. As a consequence, the boundaries between the urban and the suburban blurred, with cyclists able to experience both environments in the very same day. For at least a moment, the city had become far less suffocating.

The Modern Metropolis

The modern American city came of age alongside the bicycle. The term itself, “modern city,” only came into common usage in the 1890s, evoking an overburdened city struggling to cope with unprecedented industrialization and urbanization.²⁰³ Together with the perils of Gilded Age cities, modernity was defined by the popular cafes, the glittering department stores, the august cultural institutions, and the lively streets which cyclists helped pave. Modernity celebrated commoditization, rationalization, individualization, and innovation like never before. Surely, bicycles were commoditized, exulted for enhancing individual mobility, and widely credited (or blamed) for contributing to the acceleration of urban life.²⁰⁴ Yet, in other ways, bicycles imbued fin de siècle metropolises with a modern glow. As a technological marvel, bicycles metaphorically served to symbolize the seemingly endless march of urban and American progress. As a means for showcasing oneself and promenading through the city, bicycles

²⁰² *The Physician and Surgeon*, September 1898, 411.

²⁰³ Barth, *City People*, 7-8.

²⁰⁴ For an excellent analysis of the relationship between bicycles and modernity in Canada see, Glen Norcliffe, *The Ride to Modernity: The Bicycle in Canada, 1869-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

contributed to the spectacle of urbanity. And, finally, bicycles transported urbanites into a rapidly developing and rather distinct zone of the city: nighttime.

Late-nineteenth-century Americans celebrated the bicycle as a technological marvel, a sign that the modern age had come into being. So did its manufacturers. Nearly every year new bicycle models, which sported mechanical improvements and frills that had been unimaginable just a few years earlier, flooded the market. In fact, bicycle manufacturers in the 1890s sought patents to improve their bicycles at such an alarming rate that the U.S. government created a special division within the Patent Office just to deal with bicycle-related patenting.²⁰⁵ Some of these innovations were minor, simply an excuse to issue another model and to satisfy those consumers mesmerized by the “cult of the new.” Indeed, bicycles may have been one of the first luxury items in which both customers and manufacturers expected that buyers would continually replace their purchase at regular intervals. Just as importantly, the rapid technological progress displayed in the bicycle’s evolution promoted the idea of the limitless possibilities of technology and the machine itself. As such, Americans speculated about the infinite applications of the vehicle. Military men envisioned the modern battlefield lined with cycling militias. Innovators scrambled for the next great bicycle contraption: amphibious watercycles, sailing bicycles, skating bicycles, bicycles built for two, four, six, or eight.²⁰⁶ Some began to experiment with motorized bicycles. And two famous bicycle mechanics from Ohio, inspired by the machines they tinkered with, rented, and built, debunked one of history’s great axioms. Humans, the Wright brothers proved, can indeed fly.

²⁰⁵ Axel Josephsson, “Bicycles and Tricycles,” in U.S. Census Bureau, Twelfth Census of the United States: Manufactures [1900], vol. X, pt. IV (Washington, D.C., 1902), 335.

²⁰⁶ *Enquirer* (Cincinnati), June 6, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York; Marmaduke Humphrey, “A Cycle Show in Little,” *Godey’s Magazine*, April 1896, 367-372.

Nothing embodied the power of technology better than speed. While engineers and manufacturers built bicycles capable of faster and faster speeds, racers pushed themselves to set speed records. But there was also something quite unique about the bicycle. Unlike trains, airplanes, or automobiles, bicycles functioned as an extension of the human body. It was human power that drove the chains of the bicycle. That is, in part, what made the machine so compelling. Humans could travel twenty-plus miles per hour using just their own force. “The simple fact is that the human race has discovered a new power for its own use” a journalist recorded in 1896. “He has pressed into his service the horse and various other animals, steam, electricity, and compressed air. Finally he has hit upon a device which makes his own body the source of power” and “finds that it becomes really a part of himself.”²⁰⁷ That excitement evinced itself in special races in which bicycles raced against horses and even moving trains. It was man versus equine and man (atop, of course, his own machine) versus machine.

²⁰⁷ Bishop, “Social and Economic Influence of the Bicycle,” 680-691.

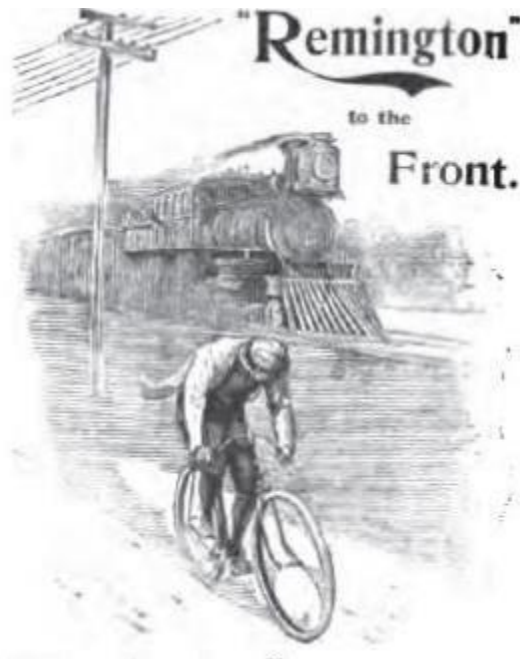


Figure 3.12: Above is an 1895 advertisement for Remington Bicycles, featuring a rider racing a moving train. These races were not uncommon. Most famously, Charles Murphy earned the nickname “Mile-a-Minute” after he successfully rode, for an entire minute, in the slipstream of a train moving at sixty miles per hour. As the *New York Times* article from 1899 reported about the stunt, the cyclist “proved that human muscle can, for a short distance at least, excel the best power of steam and steel and iron.” Sources: “Remington Bicycle Advertisement,” *Munsey’s Magazine*, 1895; “Beat a Mile a Minute,” *New York Times*, July 1, 1899.

Cyclists often defined the bicycle as part of themselves, an almost robotic tool. Described by a French rider, “The cyclist is a man made half of flesh and half of steel that only our century of science and iron could have spawned.”²⁰⁸ Another cyclist described his wheel as an almost sentient object, certainly much more than just a machine. It served, as he put it, as an “echo of yourself at your best or at your worst.”²⁰⁹ Others reported remarkably similar observations: “The bicycle obeys the slightest impulse moving at will, almost without conscious effort, virtually as much a part of the rider, and as easily under control, as hand or foot.”²¹⁰ And as an older, female cyclist recounted about what learning to ride the bicycle had done for her: “I had made myself master of the most remarkable, ingenious, and inspiring motor ever yet devised upon this

²⁰⁸ As quoted in, Thompson, *The Tour de France*, 27.

²⁰⁹ Jean Porter Rudd, “My Wheel and I,” *Outing*, May 1895, 128.

²¹⁰ Ward, *Bicycling for Ladies*, 189.

planet.”²¹¹ The technology behind the bicycle and its every iteration was widely praised, but, even more so, was its ability to tap into the human body and maximize human power.

In the 1890s, the bicycle became popular as an instrument for utility and recreation, but also for a segment of the urban population, as part of an emerging culture of spectatorship. Bicycle racing, like horse racing, baseball, and other sports attracted a mass audience seeking to experience the thrill of speed and the excitement of competition.²¹² Inside arenas, jaws dropped and media outlets swarmed at the six-day races in which racers circled a single track for 144 straight hours (or at least as many laps as they could endure).²¹³ On city streets, bicycles also served as a tool for public display, adding another dimension to the modern city.

There may not have been another spectacle more prevalent in late-nineteenth-century urban America than the parade. Although parades had long been used as a way to visually express a set of ideas—be it patriotism, solidarity, or disgust—the frequency and scale of these urban street spectacles increased dramatically toward the end of the nineteenth century.²¹⁴ Groups small and large in cities throughout the country coalesced along lines of mutual interest to put on imaginative performances designed to entertain as much as anything else. As cycling advocates used the public theater of the streets to dramatize their cause, bicycles became a conspicuous object in 1890s parades. While some parades, such as the massive 1896 demonstration in San

²¹¹ Willard, *A Wheel Within a Wheel*, 75

²¹² Although it is not the focus of this study, bicycle racing in the late nineteenth century attracted an enormous and devoted following. For more see, Peter Nye, *Hearts of Lions: The Story of American Bicycle Racing* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1989); Peter Nye et al., *The Six-Day Bicycle Races: America's Jazz Age Sport* (San Francisco: Cycle Publishing, 2006); Andrew Ritchie, *Major Taylor: The Extraordinary Career of a Champion Bicycle Racer* (San Francisco, Bicycle Books, 1988); Major Taylor, *The Fastest Bicycle Rider in the World* (Worcester, Mass.: Wormley Pub. Co., 1928). For more on spectator sports and the emergence of the modern city, see, Barth, *City People*, 148-183.

²¹³ See, Charles Meinert, “Singles Sixes in Madison Square Garden,” in *Cycle History: Proceedings of the 7th International Cycle History Conference* (San Francisco: Rob van der Plas, 1997).

²¹⁴ For more on urban parades see, Susan G. Davis, *Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Mary Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); Mary Ryan, “The American Parade: Representation of the Nineteenth-Century Social Order” in Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

Francisco that began with a demand to repave a popular thoroughfare, took the form of political protest, the parades, which ranged from small shows of appreciation to grand city-wide pageants of extravagance, were mostly celebratory in nature. Taking advantage of dramatic lighting, wheelmen and wheelwomen often favored parading through the moon-lit city, celebrating an achievement, honoring an individual, or demonstrating their political will. Miles of paraders towed Chinese lanterns through Brooklyn to thank their Parks Commissioner for the Coney Island Bicycle Path, while thousands of Chicagoans participated in three separate torchlight parades designed to express their dual support for the presidential candidate William McKinley and the principle of “sound money.”²¹⁵ In Brooklyn, riders communed for a celebratory procession thanking the City of Churches for finally paving a long-deteriorated street. And in Hartford, Connecticut cycling paraders paid homage to their true hero: a steam street roller. Serving as the Grand Marshal of the 1896 Hartford parade celebrating the city’s newly asphalted Main Street, an illuminated “baby” steam street roller covered in red, white, and blue led a battalion of city cyclists in a triumphant march.²¹⁶

Parades came and went, but streets were already the sites of everyday performances. It was those streets that provided the stage on which the spectacle of modernity unfolded. Broadway, in New York, for example, was already known for its theater. By the end of the nineteenth century, it had a well-deserved reputation as an avenue for spectatorship and display.²¹⁷ Glittering under the newly installed electric lights “it is a continuous vaudeville that

²¹⁵ “Night Parade of Brooklyn Cyclists,” *New York Journal*, September 27, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York; “Brooklyn to Have a Night Parade,” *New York Journal*, September 26, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.; *Chicago Times Herald*, September 24, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

²¹⁶ “On the Wheel,” *Standard Union* (Brooklyn), September 30, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York; *Municipal Engineering*, December, 1896, 391.

²¹⁷ For an interesting example of how Broadway was used as a promenade, an avenue for theater, a stage on which to assert status and class see, Mona Domosh, “Those “Gorgeous Incongruities’: Polite Politics and Public Space on

is worth many times the ‘price of admission’—especially as no admission price is asked,” a writer in 1904 described. “Where else is there such a free performance—such a festive panorama of gay life as Broadway ‘puts up’ when the lights are on.”²¹⁸ The northern section of the road/theater that was but years earlier described as a “howling wilderness” rapidly evolved into a “great bicycle thoroughfare” where the urban beat rang loudest.²¹⁹ As the noted author Stephen Crane explained the transformation of Broadway (known as the Boulevard),

[it] has vaulted to a startling prominence, and is now one of the sights of New York. This is caused by the bicycle. Once the boulevard was a quiet avenue, whose particular distinctions were its shade trees and its third footwalk, which extended, in Parisian fashion, down the middle of the street. Also it was noted for its billboards and its huge and slumberous apartment hotels. Now, however, it is the great thoroughfare for bicycles. On these gorgeous spring days they appear in thousands. All mankind is awheel, apparently, and a person on nothing but legs feels like a strange animal... The bicycle crowd has completely subjugated the street. The glittering wheels dominate it from end to end. The cafes and dining rooms of the apartment hotels are occupied mainly by people in bicycle clothes. Even the billboards have surrendered. They advertise wheels and lamps and tires and patent saddles with all the flaming vehemence of circus art... Down at the circle, where stands the patient Columbus, the stores are crowded with bicycle goods. There are innumerable repair shops. Everything is bicycle. In the afternoon the parade begins.²²⁰

That everyday parade became a fixture for those wanting to see and be seen. So much so that when a New York alderman proposed to divide traffic on the congested Boulevard, he insisted that the cyclists be kept on the inside portion of the road so that they could be “reviewed by pedestrians,” acknowledging that “it was one of the pleasantest sights in the city to watch the bicyclists in the boulevard.”²²¹ Likewise, local press outlets from other cities noted how certain cyclists enjoyed the bicycle for its exhibitory nature, as they wheeled down the main

the Streets of Nineteenth-Century,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 88, No 2 (June 1998): 209-226.

²¹⁸ *The Four Track News*, 1904 as quoted in David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 8-9.

²¹⁹ “An Evening on the Boulevard,” *Harper’s Weekly*, August 28, 1897.

²²⁰ “Mighty Army on Wheel,” *Boston Globe*, July 5, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

²²¹ “Rights of Wheelmen are Recognized,” *New York Herald*, October 7, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

thoroughfares “decked out in fantastic costumes” and inviting spectators.²²² Women, especially, attracted the male gaze and, accordingly, were warned about how to perform. “The ordinary wheelwoman would regard it is as exceedingly bad form to race through the streets for the diversion and derision of irreverent male spectators,” the *Rochester Herald* cautioned in 1896, before admitting that “A pretty young woman riding for recreation is indeed an engaging spectacle...”²²³ As bicycles dispersed workers and goods through the city, they also served as a moving stage.

Although cyclists participated in the daily spectacles of performance and promenade, the scene took on a different meaning after dark. Each night on the Boulevard a segment of the cycling community appeared (figure 3.13). Glittering lamps and crescent moons only added drama to such performances. The cyclists who gathered there fortified Broadway’s already growing reputation as the Great White Way and as a primary scene for spectacle and modernity.²²⁴

²²² “Is Bicycling Immoral?” *New York Journal*, August 1, 1896, in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

²²³ “A Wise Injunction,” *Rochester Herald*, June 21, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

²²⁴ Peter C. Baldwin, “Nocturnal Habits and Dark Wisdom’: The American Response to Children in the Streets at Night, 1880-1930,” *Journal of Social History* 35, no. 3 (spring 2002): 594; William Chapman Sharpe, *New York Nocturne: The City After Dark in Literature, Painting, and Photography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 6.

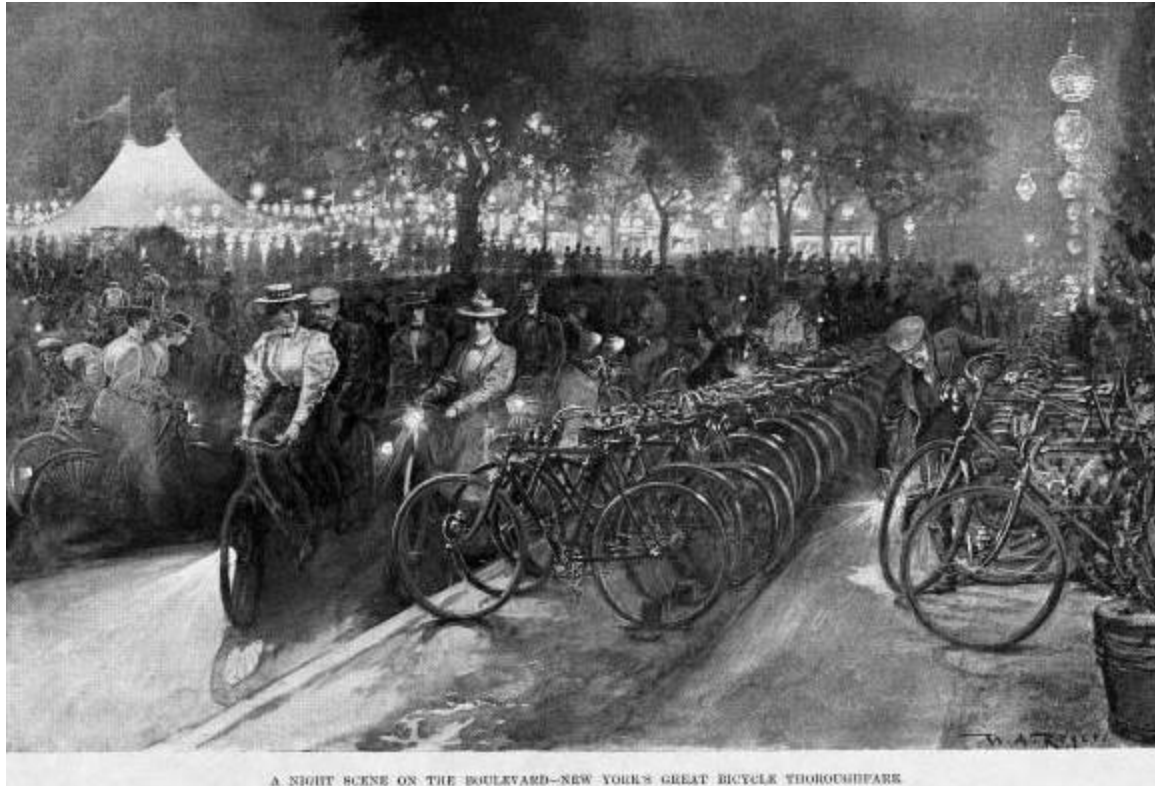


Figure 3.13: On any given night on Broadway just above 59th street (or the “Boulevard”) the modern city came alive. Cyclists transformed the asphalt path into a massive theater, filled with lights, spectacle, and merriment. As a columnist for *Harper’s Weekly* described in 1897, “Every night the lanterns of thousands of bicycles make of the Boulevard a marvellous [sic] spectacle.” Source: “An Evening on the Boulevard,” *Harper’s Weekly*, August 28, 1897.

A similar scene, perhaps slightly less grand, could be found on main streets in prominent cities across the country. “The great avenues of our larger cities were made extremely picturesque in the dusk of evening by the endless line of bicyclists whose lanterns in the darkness produced the vivid effect of a river of colored fire” a journalist reckoned.²²⁵ While the mornings featured cyclists “en route for their places of business” and the days invited “the wheels that carry ladies and children...out for shopping expeditions or for some of the various institutions of learning,” a Charleston newspaper reported in 1896 that the scene changed dramatically after sunset. Then, “wheelmen and wheelwomen are out for pleasure only” and it was then, with their

²²⁵ “The Return of the Horse,” *The Bookman*, March-August, 1901, 425.

brilliant lanterns and moonlit wheels, that urban cycling became an evening attraction.²²⁶ That same year, a New York newspaper confirmed that “the riding of bicycles through the streets of this city at night has become so common that at some hours of the evening thousands of the light wheels are spinning along the main thoroughfares,” taking advantage of the relatively quiet roads and quiet lamp-lit ambience.²²⁷ In Chicago, a certain wheelwoman, in fact the wife of the city’s cycling mayor, Carter Harrison, remembered her Astor Street neighbors wolfing down their dinners “for it was just a foregone conclusion that every one took a ride after dinner in the cool of the evening.”²²⁸

Cyclists, who found that the parks offered unrivaled serenity at night, awoke the slumbering parks, which had traditionally fallen asleep each night. In 1896, a parks commissioner in New York reported that the popularity of night cycling necessitated that city parks be outfitted with lights. Before cycling had taken over the city, “the parks were not thought a proper place to go at night. Of course, the cycle has changed this condition, and the parks are patronized by greater numbers after nightfall than in the daytime.”²²⁹ Likewise, Chicago’s Washington Park and Jackson Park welcomed thousands of cyclists “on pleasant nights [to] enjoy a good rest before speeding back to town.” There, wheelmen and wheelwomen sat “together, to look out over the lake and wonder what the wild waves are saying. If the moon happens to be rising out of the lake it adds a new charm and makes the place especially attractive to bicycling lovers.” Occasionally, people on horses and pedestrians could be seen, but as the

²²⁶ *News Enquirer* (Charleston), October 20, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

²²⁷ “Safety of Wheelmen at Night,” *New York Tribune*, September 8, 1896.

²²⁸ Edith Ogden Harrison, Writing and Outgoing correspondence, “Bicycles and Billiards” N.D, Midwest MS Harrison Box 19 Folder 952, Newberry Library, Chicago.

²²⁹ “Cycle News,” *New York Recorder*, July 2, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

Chicago Times-Herald reported, they appeared “strange and lonely and sadly out of place.”²³⁰ At night and even more so than during the day the parks were the dens of cyclists.

That so many cyclists relished the evening air is well evidenced by the many cyclists charged with violating ordinances that required cyclists to carry lighted lamps after sunset. As part of the comprehensive traffic codes that urban cycling necessitated, most municipalities incorporated some kind of lighting provision. The extent to which cyclists failed to obey the law was borne out in police reports, news stories, and even song lyrics, including a very popular ditty “Get Your Lamps Lit!” with the rather monotonous lyrics: “Get your lamps lit, get your lamps lit,/ If you don't I will soon run you in,/ Miss Wise was all right for she had a search light,/ So safely along did she spin,/ Get your lamps lit, get your lamps lit,/ Miss Foolish was fined the next day,/ Which opened her eyes; Miss Foolish got wise,/ And bought a search light right away.”²³¹

In Chicago, so many riders ignored the ordinance that lamp-less cyclists and their wheels filled jailhouses. From the mayor’s perspective, jail time seemed a disproportionate penalty. Ultimately, the city council agreed and enacted a new ordinance, which mandated that the arresting officer release the violators so long as “such person shall consent that the bicycle...without a lighted lamp, may be taken in custody.”²³² In other words, the bicycle would be jailed instead of the cyclist. Perhaps, the many law-breaking, night-riding cyclists opposed the artificial light given off by cycle lamps or maybe they were just lazy, careless, or watching their pennies. Regardless, there is no doubt that a growing group of urban riders took to the streets at night.

²³⁰ “News of Wheels and Wheelman,” *Chicago Times Herald*, June 7, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

²³¹ “Bicycle Riders Locked Up,” *New York Times*, September 17, 1893; “Lights on Vehicles at Night,” *New York Times*, November 5, 1899; Indiana University, <http://www.indiana.edu/~liblilly/awheel/awheel7.html>. (accessed August 13, 2010).

²³² *Proceedings of the City Council of the City of Chicago for the Municipal Year 1896-1897* (Chicago: Press of John F. Higgins, 1897), 690, 760.

No matter the city, nighttime offered a special attraction: a new environment in which to ride. The terrain and topography may have been no different, but cyclists relished the urban atmosphere at night. For some cyclists the attraction of riding at night was decidedly anti-urban. Just as urbanites fled the city for the romanticized natural landscape of the country, so too did overtaxed city dwellers find a romanticized cityscape after dark. With the moon came an idealized version of city life. “The night provided a special access to nature and made the blessings of the country available even in city streets.”²³³ Quiet streets and darkened buildings hid the fixtures of urbanity. Accidents were far fewer and the pace of motion slowed to match the city’s resting pulse.²³⁴ As one urban cyclist expressed, “If there is anything more charming in bicycling than a morning run it is a quiet evening spin by moonlight. The stillness unbroken by the soundless wheels, the absence of dust and wind, and the coolness of the air, the wired and shadowy charms of the landscape and street vistas, make it delightful to the imagination as well as to the senses.”²³⁵

While the night offered a romanticized vision of the city, it could also signify the dangers and vices of the modern metropolis. Nighttime had long been associated with crime and immorality, as shadowy streets seemed to invite the most unsavory activities. As the historian Peter Baldwin writes, “Modern urban night was not an extension of day; it was a liminal new world in which conflicting moral values mingled uneasily.”²³⁶ Anxious city dwellers worried about what all those cyclists did at night, in particular, women. One such concerned citizen warned that “If the purpose is to use the wheel to get soonest away from the abodes of men and the security and censure of the public eye; if the darkness is chosen to cover an intended attack

²³³ Sharpe, *New York Nocturne*, 84.

²³⁴ “Safety of Wheelmen at Night,” *New York Tribune*, September 8, 1896.

²³⁵ Charles Pratt, *What & Why: Some Common Questions Answered* (Boston: Press of Rockwell and Churchill, 1884), 17.

²³⁶ Baldwin, “Nocturnal Habits and Dark Wisdom,” 596-597.

upon innocence and virtue, then the moral danger is great, because the circumstances offer favorable opportunity for the accomplishment of those intentions.”²³⁷ To be sure, the cover of night offered an opportunity for unsanctioned activities, but also, the chance to enjoy a new, albeit temporary, version of the city.

“More than a defining feature of modernity,” as one recent scholar wrote, cyclists infused the urban world at night with a new element.²³⁸ Indeed, in the 1890s, as electric lights began to illuminate the places that gaslights had thrown but a hint of light on, city life took on new meaning. The modern city was born. And whether at night or during the day, it was on the very streets cyclists helped pave where modernity was on display. Atop machines, cyclists roamed through the city, to work or to pleasure, raced animals and other vehicles, and embraced a mechanical extension of their own human power. Their machines served more than double duty, playing the part of mobile stage, and serving as minor character in the everyday theater of the streets and the orchestrated parades. In short, the bicycle and the modern city came into being together and perhaps, to a modest degree, thanks to one another.

Conclusion

Cyclists and their advocates transformed the late-nineteenth-century city, not only because of the improved roads, new paths, and reorganized traffic schemes, but because in its totality, the bicycle served as a tool for a re-conception of the city. The bicycle transformed notions of time, space, and urban boundaries; modernity and reform; the urban atmosphere and the environment; and even, in this brief period of time, the meaning of the city itself. Indeed, for Americans in the

²³⁷ “Wheelmen All Stirred up by – Is Bicycling Immoral?” *New York Journal*, August 16, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

²³⁸ Sharpe, *New York Nocturne*, 8.

1890s the bicycle promised to solve many problems with a single solution. Urban mobility improved. Commuters could get to work as easily as urbanites could escape the city. But the effect was much larger. Bicycles could render the city more efficient and the country more accessible and at the same time offer the promise of a revitalized, healthful, clean, and moral urban environment. As one author aptly summed up in 1897, “the bicycle seems destined to be an important factor in setting people to thinking about great problems of modern life.”²³⁹ True enough, it was atop the bicycle that so many urbanites came to see the imperfections of the modern city. Equally so, it was the bicycle that would seem to prove so capable in fixing the flaws of urban life, making the modern city, in short, more livable.

²³⁹ A.C. True, “The Solidarity of Town and Farm,” *The Arena*, March 1897, 546.

Chapter 4

“Everyone Rides”¹: The Social and Cultural Dynamics of Cycling

“The bicycle is the most democratic of machines.”² “Old and young, rich and poor, men and women, boys and girls—all caught the ‘bicycle fever.’”³ “The bank president and the clerk, the society leader and the shop girl ride side by side.” “As a social leveler the bicycle has been unequalled.”⁴ “Its use is confined to no class.”⁵ “The old distinctions of sex and age seem to have been effaced in the passion for the wheel.”⁶ “These effects are remarkable enough to justify the frequent assertion that as a sociological revolutionary force the bicycle is without an equal.”⁷ These sentiments, expressed separately from an array of sources across the spectrum of print media in the mid-1890s—*Scribner’s*, *Munsey’s*, the *Philadelphia Record*, the *Albany Press*, the *Detroit Free Press*, and *The Forum*—equally sang the praises of the bicycle. That the bicycle was a democratic vehicle, a social-leveler, an agent of freedom, and a gender equalizer was an opinion echoed in newspaper columns, on song sheets and painted canvases, in private diaries, in public campaigns, and along city streets.

As a novel piece of technology that provided both a new form of transportation and a new form of recreation and leisure, bicycles served a diverse set of city dwellers who adopted the machine for an equally diverse set of purposes. Aside from the obvious practical advantages of

¹ “The Point of View,” *Scribner’s Magazine*, February, 1896, 256.

² “The Point of View,” 256.

³ *Munsey’s Magazine*, May 1896, 131.

⁴ “The Bicycle as a Social Factor,” *Philadelphia Record*, September 16, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, May 26, 1896-February 11, 1897, and undated, New-York Historical Society, New York.

⁵ “A Democratic Vehicle,” *The Detroit Free Press* as quoted in E. Nash, *Historic and Humorous Sketches of the Donkey, Horse and Bicycle* (Little Rock: Press of Tunnah and Pittard, 1896), 44.

⁶ “Influence of the Wheel,” *Press Knickerbockers* (Albany), June 29, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

⁷ Joseph B. Bishop, “Social and Economic Influence of the Bicycle,” *The Forum*, August, 1896, 682.

urban cycling, women embraced bicycles as a catalyst for unrestricted mobility, independence, freedom, and equality; affluent urbanites used them to promenade around the city and as the pretext to form exclusive social clubs; immigrant groups and blacks tested the boundaries of Americanization and integration on wheels; other less wealthy urbanites mounted their bicycles for their first trip beyond their city's walls. To be sure, the shapes, contours, limits and possibilities of the cycling city were a matter of perspective. Inside the urban kaleidoscope, cyclists of different sexes, classes, ethnic groups, and races cherished the possibilities of the bicycle even if with unique motivations. Public debate about the nature of cycling and the nature of the city quickly ensued. "Who can ride?" "How should people ride?" And, at least implicitly, "Who does the city belong to?" The answers and the questions themselves reveal not only the ever-changing dynamics of gender, race, and class within American cities, but also the powerful way in which a single invention can disrupt urban culture.

Wheeling Women

Writing in 1895, a female cyclist declared:

There is a new dawn, a dawn of emancipation, and it is brought about by the cycle. Free to wheel, free to spin out into the glorious country, unhampered by chaperon or even more dispiriting male admirer, the young girl of to-day can feel the real independence of herself, and while she is building up her better constitution she is developing her better mind...How little and cramped seem the life before the cycle came into it!⁸

⁸ As quoted in David Rubinstein, "Cycling in the 1890s," *Victorian Studies* 21, no.1 (Autumn 1977): 68. Surprisingly, there are few in-depth studies of women and bicycles. Most books about bicycles allude to the issue but do not explore it fully and many books about gender and the nineteenth century city ignore women cyclists completely. One such study, Sharon E. Wood's, *The Freedom of the Streets: Work, Citizenship, and Sexuality in a Gilded Age Study*, is brazen enough to use a picture of a woman cyclist on its cover (arguably to convey the "freedom of the streets"), but does not devote any of its pages to the issue of female cyclists. Of course, certain issues, like women's cycling dress, have received more attention than others. Most of the book-length scholarly works that do focus on women's cycling issues have not been published. See, for example, Sheila Hanlon, "The Lady Cyclist: A Gender Analysis of Women's Cycling Culture in 1890s" (PhD diss., York University, 2009); Sarah Overbaugh Hallenbeck, "Writing the Bicycle: Women, Rhetoric, and Technology in Late Nineteenth-Century

Times were changing. And the bicycle, many women believed, was to thank for it.

When bicycles first crossed the Atlantic, respectable men had rolled precariously atop their high-wheel machines, as affluent women sat on the sidelines or comfortably in their tricycles. The obvious dichotomy was, for some, welcome. Any woman who dared to master the bicycle was deemed a “circus lady” or a “semi-monster.”⁹ But in the early 1890s, when innovation spurred the low-mounted safety-bicycles and as manufacturers built, marketers pitched, and dealers sold machines specially-designed for women, they began to embrace “the wheel.” Soon they joined the craze in astounding numbers. Likely, more than a million American women, most living in cities, became cyclists during the 1890s.¹⁰ By doing so, they threatened to challenge many of the unspoken rules that governed the urban world.

As quickly as women adopted the bicycle, detractors called into question the appropriateness of female cyclists. Since bicycles, defined as machines, operated as vehicles, and used for commerce and utility as much as for sport and recreation, represented, for some, the much embraced manliness of late-nineteenth-century America, women riders faced the challenge of participating in a decidedly masculine activity. Not to mention that, traditionally, women had almost always been passengers not drivers. Horses pulled and men steered the carriages that bobbed along the nineteenth-century city’s crooked streets. Even when women did mount horses by themselves, they were encouraged to ride in the more ladylike sidesaddle position. Bicycles

America” (PhD diss., UNC Chapel Hill, 2009); Marie Brock, “The Bicycle as Vehicle to Women’s Emancipation as Reflected in Popular Culture 1888-1900,” (Master’s thesis, The University of Houston-Clear Lake, 2004).

⁹ Maurice Thompson, “What We Gain in the Bicycle,” *The Chautauquan*, August 1897, 549; Frances E. Willard, *A Wheel Within a Wheel: How I Learned to Ride the Bicycle With Some Reflections By the Way* (Chicago: Woman’s Temperance Publishing Association, 1895), 13-14.

¹⁰ It is difficult to estimate the exact proportion of male/female riders, but they likely comprised somewhere between one-quarter and one-third of the cycling population. At roughly the same time women cyclists in cities around the world adopted the wheel in record numbers. How the bicycle altered women’s lives and changing notions of gender surely varied across the globe, but for one perspective, that in many way parallels, the experience of women riders in the United States see, C. Simpson “Respectable Identities: New Zealand Nineteenth-Century ‘New Women’ – On Bicycles!” *International Journal of the History of Sport* 18:2 (2001): 54-77.

offered no such option. Instead, bicycles required women to mount and operate the machine in exactly the same way as men.¹¹ More broadly, athletics had long been a male-dominated world. Running was simply “unladylike.”¹² Even when walking, women were reminded to “walk with modest step and even pace.”¹³ Although women were beginning to take up sporting activities in greater numbers, few were as public as cycling. Female tennis players, for instance, served and volleyed within the confines of a small (and often private) court, while female cyclists drove through crowded downtown districts, inside city parks, and around the city, all the while subject to public scrutiny. Despite resistance, there was even a growing contingent of female professional bicycle racers.¹⁴

The debates about female cyclists spiraled into a national discussion, encompassing a range of issues such as femininity, Victorian respectability, and physical health. Perhaps most prominently, though, female bicycle riding endangered conventional beliefs and practices regarding public space.¹⁵ Although the notion of complete “separate spheres,” when women lived in isolation from the public, male-dominated world, has long been discredited, urban geography certainly has an important gendered context.¹⁶ Public spaces are, after all, governed

¹¹ For more on the issue of sidesaddles and bicycles see, Patricia Marks, *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers: The New Woman in the Popular Press* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1990), 186.

¹² Luther Henry Porter, *Cycling for Health and Pleasure: An Indispensable Guide to the Successful Use of the Wheel* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1896), 21.

¹³ Mary L. Bisland, “Woman’s Cycle,” *Godey’s Magazine*, April 1896, 386.

¹⁴ “A Wise Injunction,” *Rochester Herald*, June 21, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York. For more on professional women cyclists see, Clare S. Simpson, “Capitalising on Curiosity: Women’s Professional Cycle Racing in the Late-Nineteenth Century” in Dave Horton et al., eds., *Cycling and Society* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Co, 2007); Peter Zheutlin, *Around the World on Two Wheels: Annie Londonderry’s Extraordinary Ride* (New York: Turnaround, 2007).

¹⁵ For historical studies on women and public space see, Sharon E. Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets: Work, Citizenship, and Sexuality in a Gilded Age City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹⁶ See, for example, Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets*, 7.

by a set of codes, formal and informal.¹⁷ Notions of domesticity and expectations of “ladylike” behavior pervaded not just the home, but the public sphere as well.¹⁸ Certain areas of the city were deemed “off limits” for respectable women. Traveling alone was discouraged. While loitering men might be characterized as flâneurs, women could be labeled streetwalkers.¹⁹ Proper etiquette dictated that women should cut inconspicuous figures, avoid wearing bright colors, and do their best to move through the city unnoticed.²⁰ “The quieter and less conspicuous her costume the better,” one advice columnist in 1895 moralized. “Picturesque effects are better reserved for ball gowns and home wear.”²¹

By the turn of the century, as historian Sarah Deutsch has shown, women began to display a new ability “to negotiate the urban terrain on their own terms.” This newfound independence was not the product of simple modernization and does not fall neatly into the Whiggish historical narrative; rather, progress was a result of “the determination of individuals and organized groups to redesign the city for their own purposes.”²² Many of these individuals recognized the bicycle’s role in their newfound mobility, which had provided them with a special gift only women could appreciate. For men, the bicycle offered a faster commute, a new means of recreation, and a bridge on which to pedal away from the city; for women, as one cyclist

¹⁷ Mona Domosh, “Those ‘Gorgeous Incongruities’: Polite Politics and Public Space on the Streets of Nineteenth-Century,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 88, no 2 (June 1998): 209-226.

¹⁸ For example, both Phillip Gordon Mackintosh and Sheila Hanlon argue that bourgeois urbanites adopted the bicycle, despite its very public nature, in a way that furthered notions of domesticity outside of its traditional place in the home. Phillip Gordon Mackintosh, “A Bourgeois Geography of Domestic Bicycling: Using Public Space Responsibly in Toronto and Niagara-on-the-Lake, 1890-1900,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 20, no.1/2 (March/June 2007): 126-157; Hanlon, “The Lady Cyclist,” 100.

¹⁹ Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets*, 7.

²⁰ Maureen E. Montgomery, *Displaying Women: Spectacles of Leisure in Edith Wharton’s New York* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 99.

²¹ “Evadne’s Column,” *Bicycling World*, June 21, 1895, 149.

²² Deutsch, *Women and the City*, 284.

philosophized, it offered something more: “it was a steed upon which they rode into a new world.”²³

By the last decade of the nineteenth century, a dramatic reconstitution of public space and social relations was already well underway. The increasing number of women who entered the workplace, politics, reform movements, and higher education helped challenge, and in certain ways defeat, older notions of domesticity and women’s place (or lack thereof) in the public sphere.²⁴ In more places, and in more ways, women took on more public roles and, in the process, occupied a more public presence in the urban network. Previously, crowded business and downtown districts had been largely occupied by men. But by the end of the nineteenth century, the composition and character of these areas had changed. The popularization of the department store reordered the downtown aesthetic. The women who worked there, the women who shopped there, and the women who simply went downtown “to see and to be seen,” transformed once male-dominated spaces into sites of commerce and culture for women and men.²⁵ As shoppers making purchasing decisions, as wage-earning sales clerks, and by establishing a more public presence, a segment of late-nineteenth-century women recognized their increasing power.

Beyond the well-maintained sidewalks lining ritzy department stores and beyond the Ladies’ Mile in general—the name given to a stretch of New York streets dominated by department stores—and even beyond the restaurants and opera houses that began to attract

²³ *Munsey’s Magazine*, May 1896, 157.

²⁴ Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working-Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 7; Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 173.

²⁵ Gunther Barth, *City People: The Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 121-146; Robert M. Fogelson, *Downtown: Its Rise and Fall, 1880-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 14-15. See also, John F. Kasson, *Rudeness & Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990), 215; William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a new American Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993).

wealthier (although generally not unaccompanied²⁶) women, bicycles transported women around the entire city. That benefit was widely appreciated.

As one woman wrote in 1895, “Now and again a complaint arises of the narrowness of woman’s sphere. For such disorder of the soul the sufferer can do no better than to flatten her sphere to a circle, mount it, and take to the road.”²⁷ Or, as another columnist in the same year editorialized, “The greatest effect of the bicycle upon woman will be, we believe the breaking down for all time of the numerous barriers created by the prejudice and irrational thought of the centuries in regard to her ‘lot,’ ‘sphere,’ ‘place,’ etc.”²⁸ Contemporaries argued that by allowing women to widen their “sphere,” bicycles fostered not only increased mobility to travel in, around, and out of the city, but also engendered feelings of freedom and independence. Summed up by one minister, “The wheel is creating a revolution among women. It is making them fearless and independent...The bicycle will do more than any other agency to place her in her proper sphere of strength and independence,” he predicted. “And the women won’t give up the bicycle now that they have found out that it gives them not only a new delight, but sense of freedom and self-sufficiency that is as delicious as it is novel.”²⁹

City newspapers acknowledged the phenomenon as well. “The fact remains, and cannot be disputed,” the *Cleveland Critic* reported in 1896, that the woman “has advanced in her sphere since she took to the wheel.”³⁰ The *Baltimore American* noted, “This is probably the first athletic sport that has put women on equal terms with men...[and it] is also having a good

²⁶ Mona Domosh, “The ‘Women of New York’: A Fashionable Moral Geography,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 19 (2001): 578.

²⁷ Marguerite Merington, “Woman and the Bicycle,” *Scibner’s Magazine*, June 1895, 703.

²⁸ *Bicycling World*, May 10, 1895, 1101. For an interesting article on how female cyclists used bicycle maps to increase their mobility see, Christina E. Dando, “Riding the Wheel: Selling American Women Mobility and Geographic Knowledge,” *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, 6, no.2 (2007): 174-210.

²⁹ “The Pulpit and the Bicycle,” *The Arena*, August 1895, xvii-xx.

³⁰ “Woman Awheel,” *Cleveland Critic*, July 4, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

influence in making the young wheelwoman self-reliant, inspiring her with confidence in her own ability and giving her a freedom and an independence that is born of her ability to take of herself.”³¹ Yet another paper declared that “the independence of womankind has never had so great a champion as the bicycle.”³² Thousands of similar remarks echoed among media outlets, individual women, and across the city in the final years of the nineteenth century.

A group of women riders embraced the bicycle as an almost utopian instrument, enabling a radically new (and better) way of life. As one female cyclist noted, the benefits of cycling were too many to count: “The first is that it gives one the gratification of being one’s own master or mistress; another is the simplicity of the exercise, while the third is the fact, to which all riders can testify, that it improves the physical health, thus benefiting us mentally and morally.” That was just the beginning. “Then there is a feeling of gratification in being independent of coachmen or grooms,” Cora Potter continued. And finally, the long list of the somewhat less obvious benefits of cycling: “Since I began riding I have been capable of much additional hard work, my appetite has been improved, and I sleep better...”³³ Although some of these effects might have been placebo, Potter joined a chorus of women who heralded the bicycle as a cure-all and boasted about its curative powers. Their enthusiasm for cycling’s revolutionary powers speaks, perhaps, to how desperately city dwellers sought an antidote to industrial urban life.

³¹ “The Woman and the Wheel,” *Baltimore American*, June 14, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

³² “Wheel Gossip,” *Cleveland Leader*, September 21, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

³³ “Cora Urquhart Potter’s Views,” *New York Times*, January 5, 1896. For more anecdotes about how cycling helped to improve a woman’s health see, Porter, *Cycling for Health and Pleasure*, 15-20. See also, “Report of Discussion Committee of the New England Women’s Club, May 30, 1896,” Records of the New England Women’s Club, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, Boston, Massachusetts, in which club members were promised that when cycling their “whole moral nature would take a turn for the better, while the revolutions of the wheel were bringing us health and improved complexions...”

Converted cyclists proselytized the dogma of cycling to fellow women. Women encouraged their mothers, daughters, and friends to ride. To ease the learning process, several female cyclists authored entire books dedicated to touting the benefits of cycling to reluctant women and teaching female novices how to ride a bicycle, how to care for and maintain their machine, and how to select appropriate attire.



Figure 4.1: Above is an image from a handbook for women cyclists authored by one such rider. The image reveals a woman performing bicycle repair and is included in a lengthy section that advises women how to properly care for and maintain their bicycle. Source: Marie E. Ward, *The Common Sense of Bicycling: Bicycling for Ladies* (New York: Brentano's, 1896), 131.

One such handbook, published in 1896, tempted its female readers with the promise that when “riding the wheel, our own powers are revealed to us, a new sense is seemingly created...you have conquered a new world, and exultingly you take possession of it.” Once

converted, the female cyclist could expect improvement in her health, mechanical skills, a superior way to move about the city, and the “joy of being free.”³⁴

Still, female riders faced an array of uncertainty regarding cycling in the city. How should women cycle about the city? What is an appropriate costume? Are the rules governing behavior between the sexes altered atop of a bicycle? The discussions that ensued revealed that bicycles, indeed, posed a potential threat to traditional gender norms and social relations. Some called it progress, others indecency. Sensing a potential sea change, journalists for cycling periodicals, advice columnists, etiquette experts, and even bicycle merchants weighed in on the ways in which urban women could and should ride bicycles.

Few etiquette books, which, as a genre, proliferated in the final decades of the nineteenth century, failed to notice the rising popularity of cycling and its effect on social relations.³⁵ Books advised their readers about the proper way to mount, ride, and cycle about the cityscape. As a whole, female authors of etiquette books, as well as the etiquette experts featured in popular advice columns, approved of lady cyclists under one condition: that they remained “ladylike.” Most guides included a detailed set of rules designed to guarantee that women maintain their femininity and virtuousness while riding. At the top of the list was ensuring that female cyclists distinguish themselves from the most masculine of riders—those riding for sport or thrill of speed. As such, etiquette authorities advised that women cycle in an erect position, never ride a bicycle with racing (curved-down) handlebars, and to never ride at a “race pace.”³⁶ Moreover, to ensure that women on wheels preserved their integrity, guides often suggested that single women

³⁴ Marie E. Ward, *The Common Sense of Bicycling: Bicycling for Ladies* (New York: Brentano's, 1896), 12-13, 99.

³⁵ For more on the subject of etiquette and etiquette books in nineteenth-century America see, John F. Kasson, *Rudeness & Civility*.

³⁶ Maud C. Cooke, *Social Etiquette* (Boston: Geo. M Smith & Co., 1896), 345-346; “A Wise Injunction,” *Rochester Herald*, June 21, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

going out for a spin should always be accompanied by a chaperon, a task that since “every one rides nowadays,” the author of one such book from 1896 noted, is “an affair easily managed.”³⁷

Men too needed to understand the implications of women joining the ranks of urban cyclists. Those who bought their bicycles inside Chicago’s Siegel, Cooper and Company’s eight-story department store received, “compliments of the big store,” a *Cycling Record Book*, which gave purchasers space to record their rides and distances, introduced neophyte wheelmen to the local laws regarding cycling, and lectured male riders on how to behave around their female companions on wheels. Proper road etiquette dictated, the pocket-sized guide explained, that a true gentlemen hold a lady’s wheel as she mounted it and that a man always ride on a woman’s left so he can “have his right arm ready to give assistance,” among innumerable other rules, some rational, others far from it.³⁸

Most of the voices sounding off about female cyclists, though, directed their instruction to women. Major cycling periodicals, like *Bicycling World*, featured regular advice columns for women riders. Others, including *American Wheelmen*, published entire issues devoted to female cyclists, while whole magazines, like *The Wheelwoman*, catered exclusively to an all-female cyclist readership.³⁹ Together, they provided practical information about cycling, bicycle-related news, and a host of advice (and debate) about the ways in which women should adopt the bicycle. These issues of cycling etiquette and, more generally, how cyclists should “behave” among the moving parts of the city, became such an important feature of late-nineteenth-century American life that the relevant debates echoed in channels far removed from just the cycling press.

³⁷ Cooke, *Social Etiquette*, 344.

³⁸ *Cycling Record Book, Season 1898* (Cleveland: Siegel, Cooper and Company, 1898), 39.

³⁹ See, for example, “Evadne’s Column,” *Bicycling World*, July 19, 1895, 394; *American Wheelmen*, May 28, 1896; *The Wheelwoman*, June 1896.

In fact, advice for women riders came from media outlets of every kind and from every region. In New Orleans, the local paper gave some simple advice to the southern belles of the Crescent City who hoped to remain the darlings of that city: “sit straight, ride slowly, have the saddle high enough, use short cranks, never, never chew gum, conduct yourself altogether in a ladylike manner and sensible people will not shake their heads in disapproval when you ride.”⁴⁰ Even *Good Housekeeping* magazine, dedicated to the “interests of the higher life of the household,” weighed in on how bicycles transformed traditional etiquette and proper comportment outside the home. The magazine’s writers endorsed cycling, but they stressed, like so many others, that women must work hard to maintain their respectability as they rode about the city. Refinement, the magazine implored, should not be “throw[n] to the winds.” *Good Housekeeping* cautioned its readership about riding too fast or on the sidewalks, wearing an “immodest costume,” and, most certainly, from making “new acquaintances while on her wheel.” The final point was underscored by an admission that co-ed bicycling and mingling had led to rather “objectionable intimacies.”⁴¹ Ultimately, and perhaps most importantly, advice experts argued, women cyclists were just that—women. And maintaining their femininity, while engaged in an activity that appeared to some as anything but, was essential.

Outside of the press, the debates over female cycling and the insistence that women riders retain their femininity carried on into the streets. One cycling parade serves to illustrate how bicycles complicated traditional masculine and feminine constructs and the enduring constraints regarding female behavior in public. On the last day of spring, 1891, more than a thousand cyclists took to Brooklyn’s winding streets for a grand parade. Throngs of spectators walled the streets and fought for seats on a Flatbush Avenue grandstand to watch the wheelmen and

⁴⁰ *Picayune* (New Orleans), August 9, 1891 as quoted in Dale A. Somers, “A City on Wheels: The Bicycle Era in New Orleans” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 8, no. 3 (Summer 1967): 235.

⁴¹ “Social Graces,” *Good Housekeeping*, March 1898, 95.

wheelwomen ride by. At the head of the parade fifty-eight female cyclists rode, all led by Miss Paige, a noted member of a popular, local bicycle club, The Prospect Lady Cyclers. The women, riding alongside (or to be exact, leading) men received applause from onlookers all along the course.⁴² At first glance, the parade looms as a remarkable example of the social fluidity engendered by the bicycle. Sweaty women and men cruised through Brooklyn together, led by a female athlete. That women had a central role in the exhibition at all was somewhat of a rarity for nineteenth-century parades.⁴³ Yet, the confines of this gender fluidity were equally as clear.

As part of the parade festivities, a group of notable Brooklynites sat amidst the crowd waiting to dole out several prizes to the most distinguished paraders. The criteria for the women's awards did not include any merit for their speed, efficiency, and certainly not anything to do with the "military precision" (a rather masculine distinction) of the all-male Harlem Wheelmen, which had earned that group thunderous applause. Indeed, many of the wheelmen marched uniformly in clubs, following orders from club officers, including positions like "commander," which came with a military-like badge, and responding to coded messages sent via bugle or whistle that indicated to the trained listener when to "mount," "fall in," and the speed at which to ride.⁴⁴ As one cycling parade marshal remembered, each cycling "officer" was to salute with his right hand, keep his men six feet apart, and lead his white-gloved, sword-carrying, uniformed battalion through the city.⁴⁵

⁴² "Grand Parade of Cyclers," *New York Times*, June 21, 1891.

⁴³ It is noteworthy that women occupied a central place within the parade at all. As Mary Ryan has shown women were often relegated to symbolic representations and it was not until the final decades of the nineteenth century that women served as actual participants in a parade. Mary Ryan, *Women in Public*, 31, 42; Mary Ryan, "The American Parade: Representation of the Nineteenth-Century Social Order" in Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 147-149.

⁴⁴ Papers of Kirk Munroe, Library of Congress; Whistle Code Philadelphia Bicycle Club 1880, Marion S. Carson Collection, Library of Congress; Articles of incorporation and by-laws of the Citizens Bicycle Club of the City of New York, New-York Historical Society, New York.

⁴⁵ Arthur P.S. Hyde *Bicycling Diary, 1892-1896*, New-York Historical Society, New York.

The female cyclists marched to quite different expectations. The parade judges ranked the women solely on their personal appearance and the ways in which they had decorated their bicycles. They reserved the top prize for the “lady in line with the most handsomely-decorated” bicycle. Ultimately, the judges awarded two young women on a tandem tricycle, decorated with roses and red, white, and blue streamers the grand prize: a “tortoise-shell and gold hairpin.” Clearly, existing gender norms mitigated some of the gains in woman’s mobility. As historian Mary Ryan has shown, parades can reveal “...in a particularly powerful, publicly sanctioned way, how contemporaries construed, displayed, and saw the urban social order.”⁴⁶ In this case, the organizers of the parade clearly delineated what constituted proper order and behavior: women could ride bicycles, but only in a specified manner.⁴⁷ While women could parade through the streets, participating in what had been seen as an overtly masculine activity, they were expected to do so with grace, beauty, and, above all, femininity.⁴⁸

If the masculine crisis of the 1890s, in which men fretted about the lack of a vigorous lifestyle, caused them to adopt sporting activities, athleticism, and a “strenuous life,” cycling was one of the rare pursuits that when done right could secure either one’s masculinity or one’s femininity. While men marched on wheels to military orders and sped around city corners women utilized the bicycle to fashionably promenade through the city. To that end, manufacturers began building machines designed to embody the varying gender roles. Men

⁴⁶ Mary Ryan, “The American Parade,” 138.

⁴⁷ Another parade, five years later, in Brooklyn aroused similar debates. Citing the “outré figures” that dominated an earlier parade in New York, the organizers gave specific instructions mandating that the cycling paraders maintain their modesty. Even still, the subsequent news commentary about the wheelwomen who participated focused most heavily on how they looked and about what they wore. See, for example, “Wheels Ruled the Road,” *New York Tribune*, June 18, 1896.

⁴⁸ “Grand Parade of Cyclers,” *New York Times*, June 21, 1891. See also, “Cyclists’ Street Parade,” *New York Times*, July 13, 1902; Maria Ward, *Bicycling for Ladies*, 115. For a contrasting view on the limitations of the bicycle’s effect, particularly related to women and the bicycle, see, Anita Rush, “The Bicycle Boom of the Gay Nineties: A Reassessment,” *Material History Bulletin* 18 (Fall 1983): 1-12.

could buy the “Napoleon” model, women the “Josephine.”⁴⁹ Men could sport the sportiest of wheels outfitted for racing and women could find an assortment of models promising lightness and grace and outfitted with practical devices, including skirt guards, designed to ensure that women would not have to abandon their feminine garb.⁵⁰ As many lady cyclists surely realized, so long as they maintained their femininity there would be fewer detractors who questioned their newfound mobility and freedom granted by the bicycle.

That women riding through the city maintain their femininity was at the core of the hubbub circling around the issue of women’s dress. Long skirts and corsets, articles nearly impossible to wear while riding a bicycle, had been commonplace among Victorian-era women. But as cycling entered the mainstream, some women riders began experimenting with clothes more conducive to athletics, including bloomers. Some women used cycling as an opportunity to test the boundaries of conventional fashion. Others tried to adapt traditional dress, and some non-cyclists wrote off the idea of “sporting women” entirely.⁵¹ Sports, and the attire they necessitated, had long been, but were rapidly losing their status as, utterly masculine. Still, conventional norms promoted modesty above all else. Even though exposing one’s ankles or arms might be cause for insults or a soured reputation, some women embraced the new clothing (on and off the bicycle) as much as they embraced the machine that required the wardrobe

⁴⁹ Ellen Gruber Garvey, “Reframing the Bicycle: Advertising-Supported Magazines and Scorching Women,” *American Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (March 1996): 66-101. For more on how bicycles developed into gender-specific machines see, Nicholas Oddy, “Bicycles,” in Pat Kirkham, ed., *The Gendered Object* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 60-69 ; Hanlon, “The Lady Cyclist,” 39-91. For more on masculinity in this era see Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen, eds., *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995); Steven A. Riess, *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 56.

⁵⁰ Ad for Andrus’ Bicycle Skirt Guard, *American Wheelmen*, July 2, 1896, 23.

⁵¹ Sarah A. Gordon, “‘Any Desired length’: Negotiating Gender through Sports Clothing, 1870-1925,” in Phillip Scranton, ed., *Beauty and Business: Commerce, Gender, and Culture in Modern America* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

change. In fact, both the clothes and the bicycles, together, became associated, as one historian has written, with “modernity and independence.”⁵²

As bloomers attracted a portion of the urban populous, others pushed back. Ultimately, a national debate ensued. Like most issues of fashion, cycling dress adopted unevenly across urban America from city to city and varied significantly, of course, according to socio-economic status.⁵³ Yet, no matter the city, the heart of the debate was exactly the same: femininity. Those concerned about women donning masculine clothing waged a war against the improper outfits. In some cities local officials and community organizations even tried to make wearing bloomers in public illegal, as they supposedly represented a grave affront to the modesty and decency of their communities.⁵⁴ Few, however, could temper the revolutionary changes sweeping American cities and the women inhabiting them. As one reporter recalled in the summer of 1896: “Three years ago a modest American woman would hardly have ventured out on the street in New York with a skirt that stopped above her ankles, and leggings that reached obviously to her knees. To-day she can do it without exciting attention. She simply has on her bicycle clothes....”⁵⁵

Women who challenged Victorian-era norms concerning dress, domesticity, and “proper” behavior” became known as “New Women.” A fixture of urban society by the 1890s, the “New Woman” epitomized those who grew tired of longstanding social norms and who sought a new era of female independence. Unlike earlier generations, many remained unmarried, pursued

⁵² Gordon, “Any Desired length,” 26-27, 36; “Cyclists and their Clothes,” *Boston Herald*, June 28, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

⁵³ “Hub of all Wheelodom,” *Washington Post*, September 6, 1896; “Bloomers versus Skirts,” *The Cherry and Black*, April 1896; “Gossip of the Cyclers,” *New York Times*, May 22, 1898; “Object to Women Bicyclists,” *New York Times*, June 15, 1895; “Not a Boy at all,” *New York Times*, November 5, 1893. For more on the issue of bloomers see, Karen McCally, “Bloomers & Bicycles: Health and Fitness in Victorian Rochester,” *Rochester History*, Vol. LXIX, No.2 (Spring 2008): 1-23. For some examples of various cycling costumes, including bloomers see, Nancy Bradfield, *Costume in Detail: 1730-1930* (New York: Costume & Fashion Press, 1997), 228-291.

⁵⁴ “The Passing Hour,” *Bicycling World*, April 26, 1895, 1017; “Y.M.C.A. vs. Bloomers,” *Bicycling World*, October 18, 1895.

⁵⁵ “The Point of View,” *Scribner’s Magazine*, June 1896, 783. See also, “The Era of the Bicycle,” *San Francisco Bulletin*, June 26, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

college educations, and professional careers.⁵⁶ As the historian Kathy Peiss has written, “In popular culture, the emergent ideal of the ‘New Woman’ imbued women’s activity in the public domain with a new sense of female self, a woman who was independent, athletic, sexual, and modern.”⁵⁷ This modern, athletic, sexualized, and independent “New Woman” was embodied by the ranks of female cyclists. Explicitly linking the two, *Godey’s Magazine* wrote about the bicycle: “It is the actual medium through which the ‘new’ woman has evolved herself.”⁵⁸ Indeed, cycling and “New Womanhood” reinforced one another, as women looking to assert their independence utilized bicycles, while cycling fostered mobility and, as widely believed, stronger and more confident women. As a member of the Ladies’ Cycling League of Minneapolis toasted in 1895, “The girls of today who hold prominent places are the strong, healthy girls who do not scream when they see a mouse, nor get frightened when a snake crosses their path—the girls who ride on cycles.”⁵⁹ Indeed, women weaved through traffic, down busy urban corridors, enjoying the sense of power that came with it.

The bicycle also created more opportunities for women and men to engage in leisure and recreation together. As part of a sweeping change in American urban culture toward the end of the nineteenth century, leisure activities moved increasingly from homosocial to heterosocial in nature.⁶⁰ At the heart of the transformation was the “New Woman” who “questioned the ‘natural’ division of women and men’s lives into separate spheres of social activity.”⁶¹ Bicycles played a role too. The bicycle, as one educator argued in 1896, “has encouraged to a degree

⁵⁶ For more background on the “New Woman” see, Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct*, 176, 245-246.

⁵⁷ Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working-Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 7.

⁵⁸ Mary L. Bisland, “Woman’s Cycle,” *Godey’s Magazine*, April 1896, 385. See also, Deutsch, *Women and the City*, 87.

⁵⁹ “The Women of To-morrow,” *Bicycling World*, January 11, 1895, 303.

⁶⁰ Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 6. For more on the world of urban leisure and amusement see, David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

⁶¹ Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 163

never before imagined to be possible the comradeship of the sexes” and, as a result, “is probably the greatest agent in breaking down barriers strengthened by centuries of tradition. Give to a woman a right to participate in the pleasures, exercise, and pastimes of men, and the absolute equality of sexes is not far away.”⁶² Indeed, some of the rigidities governing how to approach a member of the opposite sex, how to introduce oneself, and ultimately the character of dating seem to have eased atop bicycles.⁶³

As more women cycled through the city unescorted, donned in bloomers, and exercising their muscles and independence, the “New Woman” became less of a fringe element and more mainstream. “It has been woman’s success in attaining almost inaccessible places, without appearing bold or unladylike,” one writer chronicled, “that has caused a revolution in the feeling against the ‘new’ woman.”⁶⁴ Still, there was a limit. At an 1896 bicycle parade, the “New Woman” maintained a strong presence, including one rider who sported “blue golf stockings, with red diamonds at the top, tight brown knickerbockers, a man’s coat and rakish jockey cap.” One female onlooker, as reported in the press, remarked ghastly “...well, I don’t blame men for making fun of some people! Just look at her! Low handle bars, too!”⁶⁵ The racing-style handlebars and clothing designed for a man represented, at least for this one spectator, too much of a violation of gender norms. Nevertheless, shrewd bicycle manufacturers realized that these “New Women” represented a growing portion of the customer base. For “New Women” riders and, perhaps more importantly, the not-so-“New Woman” who wanted to be a “New Woman,”

⁶² Charles W. Mann, *School Recreations and Amusements* (New York: American Book Company, 1896), 172.

⁶³ Garvey, “Reframing the Bicycle,” 66-101.

⁶⁴ “Woman Awheel,” *Cleveland Critic*, July 4, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York. See also, Clare S. Simpson, “Managing public Impressions: Strategies of Nineteenth-Century Female Cyclists,” *Sporting Traditions, Journal of the Australian Society for Sports History* 19, no. 2 (May 2003): 10.

⁶⁵ “Wheels Whirled in Fine Array,” *New York Herald*, June 28, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

advertisers painted a picture of post-Victorian femininity. Before any other industry did so, bicycle companies featured women outside of the home in their advertisements.⁶⁶ (figure 4.2)

As the “New Women” on wheels carried hopes of progress, certain elements of society grew even more cautious about women cyclists. While the medical community originally had a mixed reaction in weighing the value of cycling for women, the most outspoken opponents to female cyclists had but minor concerns about the potential for physical harm. The real danger was moral hazard. The exact nature of those hazards depended, of course, on the type of woman.

Cycling increased mobility for all, but it did so in radically different ways. Society women, eager to flaunt their status and wealth outside of the home, generally shunned bloomers and joined elite clubs or patronized exclusive cycling academies, often riding indoors or at least at a safe distance from unsavory onlookers. Middle-class women rode mostly for leisure as well, touring through city parks, neighboring sites, through city streets, and, some, mirroring the activity of society women, for making their “calls,” delivering their personalized cards via bicycle.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ James D. Norris, *Advertising and the Transformation of American Society, 1865-1920* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 79. For more on bicycle-related advertisements and the “New Woman” see, Carla Willard, “Conspicuous Whiteness: The New Woman, the Old Negro, and the Vanishing Past of Early Brand Advertising,” in Carol A. Stable, ed., *Turning the Century: Essays in Media and Cultural Studies* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), 193-198.

⁶⁷ Harvey Green, *The Light of the Home: An Intimate View of the Lives of Women in Victorian America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 144-163.

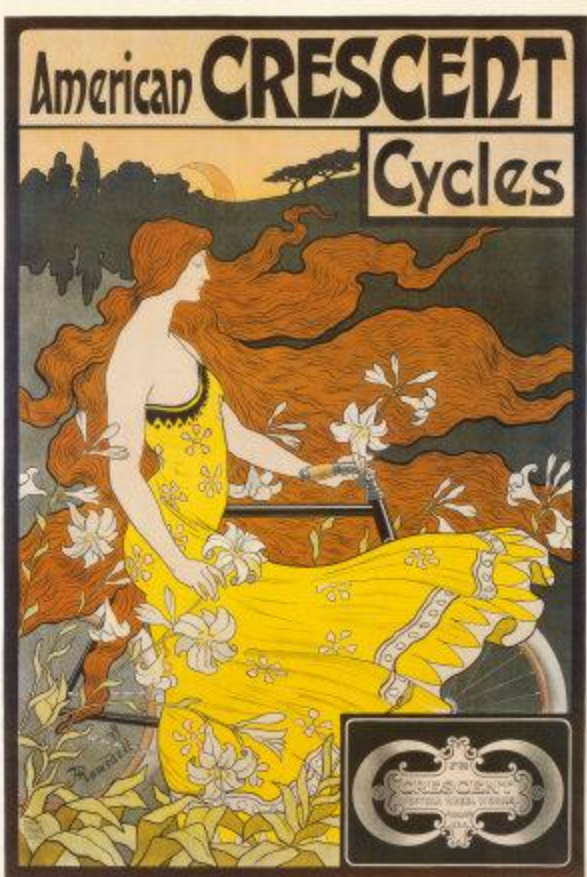


Figure 4.2: These images represent several examples of how advertisers marketed to the “New Woman.” In an ad for Crescent Bicycles (top left) the implied notion of swiftness borne out by the flowing dress and hair, combined with the theme of nature, evoke a sense of mobility and freedom to explore. The ad from Stearns Bicycles (bottom left) features a woman with short hair and a short skirt whose feet are resting in the air, exuding a carefree attitude. Although it is an ad for medical ointment and not a bicycle (top right) and although it is a British ad and not an American one, it nevertheless illustrates the phenomenon. In this 1897 ad, the young, female cyclist is wearing bloomers and is demonstrating her ability to ride as well as, or in this case superior to, her male companion.

Sources: American Crescent Cycles, 1899; Stearns Bicycles, J. Ottmann Lithograph Co., 1896; Elliman’s Universal Embrocation Advertisement, *The Graphic*, 1897.

Working-class women, though, rode as much for practical travel as for recreation. Indeed, countless women, like men, commuted to work. Clerks, office girls, school teachers, and urban women of all sorts swirled around the city en route or returning from their places of business.⁶⁸ Like the forty-four year old female schoolteacher from Olympia, Washington who in 1899 wrote to her diary about her daily bicycle commutes; how cycling made running errands, visiting friends, and taking trips to “pick wild strawberries on the prairie” a delight; how she “wheeled” to the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union convention; and how she fancied day trips to Tacoma and “wheeling around the city,” women, like men, used the bicycle for an array of purposes.⁶⁹

All commuters had to deal with a range of issues, from fighting traffic, to finding parking, and negotiating inclement weather. But women on wheels faced difficulties all their own. In fact, not just commuting women, but female cyclists of all economic classes, to varying degrees, faced moral condemnation. To be sure, until bicycles became a widely accepted tool among the urban elite, society women risked their reputations by adopting a vehicle that was fast becoming used by the masses and by challenging the traditional urban boundaries defining where proper women belonged. For society women on wheels, respectability and status could be wagered and lost by the “improper” use of the bicycle. Tradition and status anxieties pressured society women, more than others, to conduct themselves in a dignified manner, which often meant moving invisibly through the city. Society women belonged, some thought, inside homes, at club functions, and at select private spaces, certainly not publicly, and therefore brazenly, wheeling through the streets. A manners expert described the ideal of such a woman: “She

⁶⁸ Marguerite Merington, “Woman and the Bicycle,” *Scribner’s Magazine*, June 1895. See also, “Utilitarian Side of Cycling,” *Cycle Age and Trade Review*, September 22, 1898, 602. This traffic count and similar ones reveal that men cycled for purposes of commuting at a much higher rate than women. Nonetheless, plenty of women did cycle to work.

⁶⁹ Anonymous Diaries, 1899-1946, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, Boston, Massachusetts.

dresses daintily and inconspicuously—effaces herself, in fact, as much in this exercise as she does in all public places,”⁷⁰ Experts agreed that for the surrounding suburbs and country that ringed American cities the rules were “not as rigid,” but urban spaces, filled with watchful eyes, demanded certain protocols. Women on wheels, though, tested the definitions of “appropriate” behavior and, in some ways, altered those very conditions that had for so very long circumscribed public space.⁷¹ No longer confined to elegant city parks during the “fashionable hour,” society women regularly cruised down Boston’s Commonwealth Avenue and New York’s Boulevard.⁷² Leisure activities in general, be it dining out, attending the opera, or shopping at a glamorous department store, brought women squarely into the public realm of the city. As Maureen Montgomery has written, “Leisure activities enabled women of the *haute bourgeoisie* to gain access to the city” and “helped to legitimize women’s presence in public.”⁷³ And no leisure activity (cycling was almost purely recreational for most affluent urbanites) was more public than cycling in and around American metropolises.

With public space came public examination. For society women, just like others, “the sight of women on bicycles suggested independence, mobility, and emancipation, which, taken together, threatened the traditional confinement of society women to domestic space and to those public places where social interaction was carefully regulated.”⁷⁴ The omnipresent public gaze invited scrutiny, but also the opportunity to convey a carefully constructed image of oneself. Through fashionable cycling suits and luxurious bicycles, wealthy women promenaded through the streets advertising their access to wealth and, in the process, implicitly differentiated

⁷⁰ Cooke, *Social Etiquette*, 345.

⁷¹ Cooke, *Social Etiquette*, 343.

⁷² “Fair Boston Cyclists,” *Boston Post*, June 7, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.; “Doings of Cyclists,” *Morning Ado*, September 23, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

⁷³ Montgomery, *Displaying Women*, 12, (emphasis in original).

⁷⁴ Montgomery, *Displaying Women*, 5.

themselves from the rest of the ever-expanding base of cyclists. Women's magazines that gossiped about female celebrity cyclists—like famed actress Lillian Russell, royalty abroad, and wives of wealthy industrialists—conveyed the idea that cycling, done in the proper manner of course (meaning cycling in select groups, donning appropriate clothes, and riding atop the most extravagant machines), could connote aristocracy, prestige, and wealth.⁷⁵ Readers surely welcomed that assurance, considering that the democratization of once-luxury goods, like bicycles, in addition to the worlds of fashion, leisure, and shopping, only hardened class anxieties. Those anxieties manifested themselves as, in what Thorstein Veblen described in his penetrating 1899 study, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, wealthy women practicing “conspicuous leisure” and “conspicuous consumption,” displaying their wealth, status, gentility, and respectability in a flagrant way.⁷⁶ These women joined a larger class of late-nineteenth-century affluent urban women who consciously and prominently displayed their status in public.

Working class women who depended on bicycles for practical transportation as well as recreation rode through the city in quite a different manner. Although they were in certain ways more mobile (if “respectable” women risked their reputation by traveling to certain parts of the city, those without a reputation had less to lose) and, although the urban map—both in terms of mobility and gendered and moral geography—was in the midst of great revision, certain city spaces remained dangerous for working-class women who might, reformers worried, fall victim to various temptations.⁷⁷ They could also be, as one case illustrates, the subject of direct control.

In 1895, three female school teachers from New York discovered that the bicycle provided the best way to traverse their roughly two mile commute to work. Shortly thereafter,

⁷⁵ “Fashion, Fact, And Fancy,” *Godey's Magazine*, April 1896, 449.

⁷⁶ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1912); Montgomery, *Displaying Women*, 9.

⁷⁷ Deutsch, *Women and the City*, 12, 23, 78-79.

the cycling commuters came under fire. The Board of Trustees at their school castigated the teachers for setting a wholly improper example for their students. One trustee thought it wrong for any “young lady” to take to the wheel, but that it was especially dangerous for a school teacher, a model and caretaker for children, to adopt such a devilish mode of transportation. A second trustee expressed his concern about the indecent clothes necessitated by their bicycles. Today, he lamented, “They wear skirts, of course, but if we do not stop them now,” the Board Member reasoned, bloomers, trousers, and other objectionable outfits would be sure to follow.⁷⁸ Those teachers were not alone.

The following year, the debates over the appropriateness of women cyclists bubbled during a feisty campaign that captured national attention. In 1896, Charlotte Smith, President of the Woman’s National Rescue League, launched an assault that would garner her fame, hatred, and the undisputed title of the most outspoken protester against female cyclists. Mrs. Charlotte Smith, as she was called, denounced cycling as part of a larger, life-long campaign to improve the lives of working women. Over the course of her career, the reformer had worked to create lodging houses, job training programs, and to provide moral support for the growing numbers of “unfortunate women,” as she put it, living inside America’s cities.⁷⁹ She was also a noted supporter of women inventors, a cause close to her heart.⁸⁰ In these efforts, Smith embodied, in these still pre-Progressive Era days, the progressive woman, exerting political influence, taking to the streets, and working to uplift the urban populous. But it was the issue of cycling that elicited Smith’s most zealous crusade (although she did once lead a similar campaign against, what she termed, the “wicked bachelor politician.”⁸¹).

⁷⁸ “Object to Women Bicyclists,” *New York Times*, June 15, 1895;

⁷⁹ “Women Face Devery Before Saloon Crowd,” *New York Times*, October 27, 1903.

⁸⁰ Autumn Stanley, “The Champion of Women Inventors,” *American Heritage*, vol.8, iss.1 (Summer 1992).

⁸¹ “Wicked Bachelor Politicians,” *New York Times*, September 6, 1897.

Quite simply, according to Mrs. Smith, cycling was universally destructive: “The bicycle is the devil’s advance agent, morally and physically.” And it was, she tried to make clear, supremely dangerous for women. She believed that cycling promoted immorality, immodesty, unwomanly behavior, and fostered “evil associations,” as the activity itself tempted “young girls into paths that lead directly to sin.”⁸² The basis of her oversimplified argument was that more young women seemed to embrace a new, and more lax, set of social values *and* that more young women seemed to be riding bicycles. With both claims containing some elements of truth, no amount of logic could convince the smallish, stern-eyed crusader otherwise. Smith tapped into the conservative predilections of Victorian-era Americans and successfully garnered a legion of followers who joined her at mass protests and shared her vision of inaugurating a widespread “anti-bicycle movement.”⁸³

With national headquarters in Washington, D.C., and branch offices in Boston, New York, and other cycling cities, the National Woman’s Rescue League provided the muscle for Smith’s assault. While Smith gave speeches and published editorials on the subject, she enlisted her fellow “rescuers” in an army of bicycle eradicators known as the “bicycle brigade.” Formed to “smite” the “hellish thing” from city streets, the “bicycle brigade” wasted no time.⁸⁴ The troop employed an array of strategies to expose the immorality of female cyclists. In one such scheme, Smith conscripted several of her loyal followers for undercover work. Posing as ordinary cyclists, the bicycle soldiers rode through town recording statistical and anecdotal evidence about the women riders they passed. “How many girls have a chaperon; how many girls start alone and come home accompanied by men...; how many go to roadhouses; what do

⁸² “Cyclists and Crusaders,” *Munsey’s Magazine*, November 1896, 255; “Women to Protest,” *New York Commercial Advertiser*, July 2, 1896; “Is the Bicycle an Aid to Immorality?” *New York Journal*, July 19, 1896.

⁸³ “Against the Wheel!” *New York Tribune*, August 21, 1896.

⁸⁴ “A Charlotte Ruse,” *L.A.W. Bulletin and Good Roads*, July 17, 1896, 78.

they drink, how late do you girls remain out on their wheels at night?” were just some of the questions they hoped to answer.⁸⁵ Women shadowed women as cyclists spied on cyclists.

Although Smith found a band of devoted followers, Americans in general, denounced her.⁸⁶ Old and young, women and men, joined in criticism of Smith that, in some case, matched the vitriol with which she condemned cycling. Although historians have, quite correctly, highlighted the ways in which men sought to control female behavior, and although a select group of male doctors, ministers, and critics continued to warn against female cycling, Smith and her all-female brigade found few men willing to support them.⁸⁷ This was one case of women seeking to control women’s behavior. It was women who were the loudest opponents of women riders. Indeed, while a group of males had sought to circumscribe how women should cycle, there were very few men (or women too for that matter) who opposed cycling so adamantly, or at least, so vocally. Nonetheless, Smith’s list of enemies quickly outpaced her allied brigade. Indeed, probably the most striking effect of Smith’s efforts was the number of outraged respondents who, in the process of lambasting Smith, articulated their own support for female bicycle riding.⁸⁸

Scores of editorials written in direct response to Smith’s actions, like the one from Mrs. Eliza Archard in 1896, filled newspaper columns: “I regard the bicycle as the greatest one means of emancipating woman that has come in the last fifty years” and as a “great moral engine.”⁸⁹ Others attacked each of Smith’s well-known claims one by one. When Mrs. Smith declared that bicycles inflicted “a great curse” on America, ultimately resulting in an “army of invalids,” an

⁸⁵ “Look out, Pretty Bicyclist, You are Watched!” *New York Journal*, September 27, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

⁸⁶ For evidence about how men typically resisted the idea of “New Women” see, for example, Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization*, 13.

⁸⁷ See, for example, Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct*, 24.

⁸⁸ “Anti-Cycling Mass Meetings,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, August 20, 1896.

⁸⁹ “Not the Devil’s Advance Agent,” *New York Press*, July 3, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

impassioned reader and woman cyclist countered that if “giving woman advantages and broader fields in the walks of life, which make her superior to her less ambitious sister of the past, then bicycling is a curse. If breathing God’s pure air, lingering among the flowers, birds and green fields, in preference to stifling in the town’s narrow limits during the few hours snatched for recreation, cause one to become the invalid of the future, then we shall return to our old haunts.”⁹⁰

Undaunted, Smith marched on. “All this ‘pure of heaven’ racket,” she responded, “makes me weary of life.”⁹¹ Physically and morally, she insisted, the bicycle was crippling. However outrageous some of her points might have been, other claims might not have been completely off-base. Substantiating one of Mrs. Smith’s central concerns, a New York police captain witnessed that bicycles fostered some less than savory activities. As Captain McNamara reported in 1896, “Great numbers of women have taken to the wheel because it helps them in their business.” Prostitutes on wheels, the captain explained, could exploit the benefits of cycling as much as anyone: “They can dress to show off the form, they can make acquaintances easily, they can reach resorts and mingle with pleasure-seekers on an equal footing. We had to stop one woman a little while ago. She was young, good looking and very well dressed. She made a fine show on the wheel. She used to ride to the Shelter, at Coney Island, and make that place her headquarters for getting acquainted with men.”⁹² While actual cycling prostitutes were surely uncommon, some critics joined Mrs. Smith in condemning everyday women cyclists who they believed behaved in a manner not altogether different from prostitutes. In literary sources from the 1890s, writers linked the brazen female cyclists who dressed inappropriately, exposed

⁹⁰ “Woman and the Wheel,” *L.A.W. Bulletin and Good Roads*, July 17, 1896, 81-83.

⁹¹ “Anti-Cycling Mass Meetings,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, August 20, 1896.

⁹² “In Defence of Miss Charlotte Smith’s Accusation of Bicycle Immorality,” *New York Journal*, August 23, 1896 in *Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs*, New-York Historical Society, New York.

too much of their bodies, sought public attention, and pushed the boundaries of social convention with prostitutes.⁹³

Meanwhile, reports indicated that women on wheels cycled their way to the city's nooks and crannies most suitable for trysts. Hundreds of "bicycle maidens" congregated in one such spot hidden near a city landmark, extinguished their bicycle lamps, and shared benches with their male companions, as one concerned minister observed, "in attitudes not at all suggestive of modesty or prudence."⁹⁴ An 1896 guidebook for the "complete bachelor" also suggested that the age-old rules governing relations between single men and women were falling by the wayside. As the how-to manual reminded its male readers, "An idea that a man has the privilege of addressing any woman on a bicycle is most erroneous."⁹⁵ That rule was, apparently, oft-forgotten. Others reported that the bicycle gave women a "general license" to ignore common decency. "To go out afoot and make new acquaintances haphazard on the street would be accounted a dreadful breach of propriety. To go out and make them on a wheel is quite another matter. For a girl to exhibit her leg to the knee in promenading would be immodest. To exhibit it on a wheel is regular."⁹⁶ Indeed, bicycles had changed the social calculus governing women's behavior in public. Women of all classes rode through cities without escorts or chaperons. The very same women "who would not dream of walking alone in Central Park or of going unattended to the matinee" gleefully pedaled atop New York's streets alone.⁹⁷ Maybe Smith had reason to worry after all?

⁹³ See, for example, the excellent analysis of a series of articles that appeared in *Town Topics* by Maureen Montgomery. Montgomery, *Displaying Women*.

⁹⁴ "Wheelmen All Stirred up by –Is bicycling Immoral?" *New York Journal*, August 16, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

⁹⁵ Walter Germain, *The Complete Bachelor: Manners for Men* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1896), 145.

⁹⁶ "Is Bicycling Immoral?" *New York Journal*, August 1, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

⁹⁷ "Where Wheel Men Abound," *New York Herald*, September 16, 1894.

Maybe not. Smith surely exaggerated the moral dangers of cycling. And as time went on and as her platform grew, so too did her hyperbole. In fact, the more outrageous Smith's attacks, the louder she shouted them. She soon launched an attack on the nation's clergymen who had advocated cycling. Their true endorsement of cycling, the conspiracy-theorist Smith alleged, stemmed from unethical relationships with bicycle dealers who had supposedly provided free bicycles to ministers and given commissions to those who could convince their members to go out and buy a bicycle. These allegations, publicly rebutted, went nowhere. Neither did her efforts to secure legislation that would have banned bicycles. Neither did Smith's campaign.⁹⁸ Her efforts were, perhaps, best summed up by a somewhat tongue-in-cheek poem, published in a humorous dictionary under the entry "Smithareen," that underscores not only the attention Smith's anti-bicycle crusade garnered, but also its fate:

The wheels go round without a sound –
 The maidens hold high revel;
In sinful mood, insanelly gay,
True spinsters spin adown the way
 From duty to the devil!
They laugh, they sing, and –ting-a-ling!
 Their bells go all the morning;
Their lanterns bright bestar the night
 Pedestrians a-warning.
When lifted hands Miss Charlotte Stands,
 Good-Lording and O-myng
Her rheumatism forgotten quite,
 Her fat with anger frying.
She blocks the path that leads to wrath,
 Jack Satan's power defying.
The wheels go round without a sound
 The lights burn red and blue and green.
What's this that's found upon that ground?
 Poor Charlotte Smith's a smithareen!⁹⁹

⁹⁸ "Anti-Cycling Mass Meetings," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, August 20, 1896; "It would, Indeed, be Easter Day for the World if Bicycle Could Be Banished for the streets," *Wheeling Register*, April 18, 1897; "This City Didn't Try It: Crusade Against Bicycling by Women Collapses in New York," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 8, 1897.

⁹⁹ Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary* (Plain Label Books, 1929), 292-293.

Despite the institutional support of the National Woman's Rescue League and Smith's volunteer multi-city bicycle-brigade, the mounting popularity of cycling could not, at least for now, be stopped.

While Charlotte Smith gained national prominence by protesting against bicycle use, various reformers saw the bicycle as a new tool to advance women's rights. That bicycles served as an agent of reform was a theme embraced by many in the 1890s. Women credited it with bringing some semblance of equality among the sexes. "The magic carpet" as one writer called it, put the female cyclists on "absolute equality with any man" as "for the first time in the memory of her sex she is an absolutely free agent, and yet a woman still."¹⁰⁰ As another writer in the popular women's monthly, *Godey's Magazine*, remarked "...there is something women of every class have learned to prize as a shorter road to freedom than wide, welcoming college doors, or open gateways to the polls. In possession of her bicycle, the daughter of the nineteenth century feels that the declaration of her independence has been proclaimed...The fact is patent, that in three years' time the bicycle has created, not only a revolution, but a revelation in the thoughts and actions of our worthy female citizen."¹⁰¹ Although leading reformers would have had grounds to charge *Godey's* with exaggeration for putting the bicycle in the same category as women's suffrage or access to higher education as methods to garner equality with men, prominent women, including three of the late nineteenth century's most important reformers, welcomed the bicycle as an integral tool in the larger campaign for women's rights.

Frances Willard, Susan B. Anthony, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton all became advocates of female cycling in the 1890s. Each of these leaders, known for devoting their lives to empowering women, saw the bicycle as doing exactly that. Willard, a suffragist, educator, and

¹⁰⁰ Mary L. Bisland, "Woman's Cycle," *Godey's Magazine*, April 1896, 385-387.

¹⁰¹ Mary L. Bisland, "Woman's Cycle," *Godey's Magazine*, April 1896, 385-387.

temperance advocate, had long been a proponent of cycling, believing that the bicycle offered would-be drinkers a pleasurable alternative to an afternoon in the saloon.¹⁰² (Although it is impossible to tell if cycling actually aided in the temperance movement, many individual cyclists recorded stopping for alcohol on their trips and tipping at wheelmen's rests.¹⁰³) But the bicycle's strength, Willard came to believe, lay in its power to transform women's lives. Not only could cycling improve women's health, but the "illimitably capable machine," as she believed it to be, would also provide new momentum in the campaign to settle the "woman question."¹⁰⁴ Willard became such a devotee and advocate of cycling that in 1895 she published a widely read memoir entitled, *A Wheel Within a Wheel: How I Learned to Ride the Bicycle With Some Reflections By the Way*. The book, which recounted the elder stateswoman's struggles and ultimate satisfaction in conquering "the wheel," (she lovingly nicknamed her bicycle "Gladys") served as a lengthy paen, describing how the bicycle could serve to promote equality, health, and to endow women with access to a "wider world."¹⁰⁵

Fellow reformers Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton concurred. The bicycle, Anthony declared, "has done more to emancipate women than anything else in the world. I stand and rejoice every time I see a woman ride by on a wheel. It gives women a feeling of freedom and self-reliance. It makes her feel as if she were independent."¹⁰⁶ Stanton too saw the bicycle as a potential tool for reform. From issues ranging from religion to dress, the bicycle, she hoped,

¹⁰² Willard, *A Wheel Within a Wheel*, 12.

¹⁰³ See, for example, Joseph Bliss, *Bicycle Routes: ms. S, 1894-1903*, Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley; Arthur P.S. Hyde *Diary, 1892-1896*, New-York Historical Society, New York.

¹⁰⁴ Willard, *A Wheel Within a Wheel*, 38-39.

¹⁰⁵ Willard, *A Wheel Within a Wheel*, 73. For a more in-depth reading of the text and its implications on urban cyclists see, Phillip Gordon Mackintosh who argues that "Willard's challenge was to persuade women that the feminised bicycle, rather than contribute to the mayhem of the city as an unruly, unsophisticated male machine, made cycling possible for women without compromising their domestic values." Phillip Gordon Mackintosh, "'Wheel Within a Wheel': Frances Willard and the Feminisation of the Bicycle" in Glen Norcliffe and Rob van der Plas, eds., *Cycle History 9: Proceedings, 9th International Cycling History Conference* (Ottawa: Van Der Plas Publications, 1999). See also, Phillip Gordon Mackintosh and Glen Norcliffe, "Men, Women and the Bicycle: Gender and Social Geography of Cycling in the Late Nineteenth-Century" in Horton, *Cycling and Society*.

¹⁰⁶ "Champion of her Sex" *New York World*, February 2, 1896.

could redirect current debates and, perhaps most importantly, help foster women's independence. As Stanton wrote in an article about cycling, bicycle riding was an all-around boon for modern women. Not only would cycling improve women's health and "steady their nerves," but it would also render women more "self-reliant" and erode the old restrictions limiting women's participation in the public sphere. "The prudence and danger of most outdoor sports have practically excluded girls" Stanton wrote, but the safety and thrill of bicycles "has at last made it possible for girls to enjoy with their brothers an amusement in the open air..." The result, Stanton believed, was that the bicycle deserved to be classed as "one of the greatest blessing[s] in the 19th Century."¹⁰⁷ Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Frances Willard stand as three of the most prominent and influential women reformers of the nineteenth century. That this same triumvirate uniformly and heartily endorsed cycling for women highlighted the bicycle's potential and realized power to reframe women's place in the city and, ultimately, women's place in politics, government, economy, and the world.

Stanton (born in 1815), Anthony (born in 1820), and Willard (born in 1839) not only endorsed the bicycle as three distinguished reformers, but also as members of the elder generation. Age, often a category ignored by a generation of historians obsessed with race, class, and gender, played a crucial role in the democratization of bicycles and the subsequent effects on the urban population. "It used to be a dreary old world for the grandmothers," one journalist from West Virginia wrote in 1897. But now that "Gray hairs are as common upon a bicycle as ebon locks," women of all ages enjoyed the bicycle.¹⁰⁸ "Ancient dame[s]," a different writer

¹⁰⁷ "Shall Women Ride the Bicycle," Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Speeches and Writings*, pg. 5-6, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Lisa S. Strange and Robert S. Brown, "The Bicycle, Women's Rights, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton" *Women's Studies* 31 (2002): 609-626.

¹⁰⁸ "It would, Indeed, be Easter Day for the World if Bicycle Could Be Banished for the streets," *Wheeling Register*, April 18, 1897.

noted, could easily be found riding around the city.¹⁰⁹ “Youths and maidens, gray-bearded gentlemen, and fat ladies in bloomers may to-day be seen toiling through our park roads on the ‘steed of steel,’” reported a local paper in San Francisco.¹¹⁰ No matter the age, all riders reckoned with learning how to ride a bicycle and enjoyed the child-like splendor of “flying” through the air. Not everyone, of course, found the device so easy to master. The then fifty-plus-year-old professional historian and amateur curmudgeon, Henry Adams, recalled having “solemnly and painfully learned to ride the bicycle.”¹¹¹ But many older men, like women, relished in cycling and joined their younger counterparts with avidity. For some women, including Frances Willard, it was their age that provided a special reason for, and pleasure from, mastering the art of the bicycle. As Willard wrote:

Besides there was a special value to women in the conquest of the bicycle by a woman in her fifty-third year, and one who had so many comrades in the white-ribbon army that her action would be widely influential. Then there were minor reasons:

I did it from pure natural love of adventure—a love long hampered and impeded, like a brook that runs underground, but in this enterprise bubbling up again with somewhat of its pristine freshness and takings its merry course as of old.

Second, from a love of acquiring this new implement of power and literally putting it underfoot.

Last, but not least, because a good many people thought I could not do it at my age.

Willard, like so many others her age, proved them wrong.

Older women, younger women, society women, working-class women, middle-class women, women leisure-seekers, women paraders, women commuters, and women from all corners of the urban world found something attractive about the bicycle. The ways in which different women adopted the vehicle might have varied, but their enthusiasm for bicycles was universal. “New Women” on wheels expressed their desires for independence and equality via

¹⁰⁹ “Fair Boston Cyclists,” *Boston Post*, June 7, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

¹¹⁰ *The Argonaut*, February 18, 1895, 2.

¹¹¹ Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams: An Autobiography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 330.

the bicycle. Reformers viewed the bicycle as representative of emancipation and power; others as representative of all that had gone wrong with young city women. Many credited the machine with opening up the city, enlarging the urban map, and allowing for greater women's visibility. Others fretted about the new overt public nature of women cycling and, particularly, about the accompanying clothes they wore. Exactly how much women's lives changed, exactly how emancipating and exulting the bicycle made women feel, and exactly how much the bicycle promised women a newfound mobility and threatened to usurp traditional gender norms is impossible to quantify. But there is no doubt that, to those living in the 1890s cycling city, the bicycle provided women with a revolutionary tool that ushered in revolutionary changes.

That potential was realized by an ever-growing segment of the urban population. No longer just for young, wealthy, white men, city folk of all characterizations found their niche within the cycling city.

The Commonwheel

As Adna Weber observed in 1899, "the danger of class antagonism is particularly grave in the cities" as "the chasm created by the industrial system yawns widest."¹¹² Indeed, Gilded Age cities were ripe with extremes—opulence and grime, mansions and tenements, millionaires and the bankrupt. Mobility and the ways in which people moved about the city also bore the signs of a widening gulf between classes. Moneyed men and women sat on fine fabrics in private cabs pulled by teams of handsome horses, while wage laborers and the under or unemployed walked. Neither group particularly liked the streetcars. Wealthy types eschewed such public vehicles

¹¹² Adna Ferrin Weber, *The Growth of Cities in the Nineteenth Century: A Study in Statistics* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1899) 427.

because of the crowds they harbored. Women feared potential assault, which earned the street cars the notorious label of a “school of immorality.”¹¹³ At the other end of the spectrum, few of the urban poor could afford the fares, and in certain cities some minorities, particularly blacks, found that streetcars refused to transport them.¹¹⁴ Thus, although streetcars and the elevateds could provide mass transportation, they epitomized, for certain strands of the urban population, the limitations of public, albeit privately managed and for-profit, transportation. Consequently, both the rich and poor and nearly everyone in between relished the thought of private transportation. But to adopt such a vehicle, the wealthy demanded that it be fashionable and well-suited for leisure, while the working-class demanded affordability and functionality. Both groups arrived at the same solution: the bicycle.

In the 1890s the bicycle became the first truly independent private vehicle available to the masses. For the near entirety of human history, feet served as the primary mode of transportation. Animals had long been utilized as means to transport cargo or people, but nothing afforded mobility, independence, and accessibility as did the bicycle. To be sure, horses could provide door-to-door service, but that service came at a great expense, limiting it to a choice clientele.¹¹⁵ Even after the initial purchase, maintenance expenses (e.g., food and shelter) never ended. In fact, it not only cost more to buy a horse than a bicycle, it generally cost more to maintain a horse for a year than to purchase a brand new bicycle.¹¹⁶ Writing in 1896, an author concluded that “for the medium classes who are unable to keep horses with the accompaniment of coachmen, footmen, and other expensive auxiliaries, the invention of the silent steed has been

¹¹³ Clay McShane and Joel A. Tarr, *The Horse in the City: Living Machines in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 79.

¹¹⁴ McShane and Tarr, *The Horse in the City*, 79.

¹¹⁵ For more on the historical role of horses in urban transportation see McShane and Tarr, *The Horse in the City*.

¹¹⁶ Gary Allan Tobin, “The Bicycle Boom of the 1890’s: The Development of Private Transportation and the Birth of the Modern Tourist,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 7, no.4 (Spring 1974): 841.

a boon indeed.”¹¹⁷ Aside from cost, many urbanites found bicycles superior to horses in other ways. Horse fatigue could prematurely end a trip. And death was far more absolute when it came to an animal than a machine. Summed up by a writer in an 1895 article published in *Scribner’s*, “A bicycle is better than a horse to ninety-nine men and women out of a hundred, because it costs almost nothing to keep, and it is never tired.”¹¹⁸ Consequently, for those whose aspiration to own a horse was but “a wistful dream,” purchasing a bicycle was a very real possibility, as it needed “only to be stabled in a passageway, and fed on oil and air.”¹¹⁹ “This is now so recognized a taste that horses are no longer a necessity,” yet another commentator observed. “It is the wheel which is indispensable.”¹²⁰

Because bicycles offered the flexibility of walking, speeds greater than a horse’s trot, reliability, and affordability, bicycles quickly began to replace horses in American cities.¹²¹ Bicycles’ affordability, perhaps most importantly, enabled many non-horse-owning city dwellers to purchase their very first vehicle. Indeed, as prices declined, bicycles became a transportation alternative and a source of recreation and exercise for a majority of city men and women. Although the upfront costs, which throughout the 1890s ranged anywhere from \$10 to well over \$100, could be considerable, there were installment plans available and a robust second-hand market.¹²² Further, as one newspaper columnist detailed, significant potential cost savings—actual and implied—accrued to owning a bicycle: “The average rider saves 20 cents a day in carfare...this is exclusive of all doctor’s bills.”¹²³ Others estimated that cycling saved them as

¹¹⁷ “Current Comment,” *Godey’s Magazine*, April 1896, 449.

¹¹⁸ Phillip G. Hubert, Jr., “The Bicycle. The Wheel of To-day,” *Scribner’s Magazine*, June 1895, 692-693.

¹¹⁹ Marguerite Merington, “Woman and the Bicycle,” *Scribner’s Magazine*, June 1895, 702.

¹²⁰ Mrs. John Sherwood, *Manners & Social Usages* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Revised edition of 1901), 322.

¹²¹ “New York Herald; Chicago,” *Inter Ocean* (Chicago), August 12, 1895.

¹²² For more on installment plans and consumer credit in this era see, Lendol Calder, *Financing the American Dream: A Cultural History of Consumer Credit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

¹²³ “What a Bicycle Saves,” *New York City Leader*, August 5, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

much as \$100 a year and that purchasing a bicycle would pay for itself in the course of weeks, not years.¹²⁴

Considering the many changes ushered in by the bicycle, the democratization of urban mobility was among the most powerful. The bicycle's affordability increased the freedom of movement for a wide segment of urban Americans, including working men and women. One investigation into the "Tenement House Problem" revealed that cycling enabled working men to travel with "great ease and celerity" around the entire city. Thanks to the robust second-hand bicycle market there, the report specifically noted that for Buffalo, New York, "the bicycle plays a larger share in the comfort and convenience of the working-man in Buffalo than in any other city in America."¹²⁵ The result, as applicable in snowy Buffalo as sun-drenched Atlanta, was an increased mobility for classes which had been historically confined. As one writer explained in 1896, the transition from expensive horses to cheap bicycles had profound effects on the nature of private transportation: "What are Declarations of Independence and universal equality, and what are paltry muskets in the hands of insurgents, before the insinuating democracy of a cheap horse, that is swift, yet tractable, for any one of any age or either sex; that requires no feeding, no attendance, and no stable room? Verily, the pursuit of happiness is most reasonably attempted if the pursuer is mounted on the swiftness and comfort of a bicycle."¹²⁶ These "pursuits of happiness," the worlds of leisure and touring, exercise and recreation that had once been in the domain of only the well-to-do, became feasible for a larger portion of the urban population.

With bicycles, the countryside, parks, beaches, and suburban enclaves that had once been walled off by fences of wealth, power, and prestige became a destination for the many instead of

¹²⁴ "The Secret of the Bike's Success," *New Orleans Picayune*, June 14, 1896; "In and about Springfield," *Republican* (Springfield, Massachusetts), October 17, 1897.

¹²⁵ William A. Douglas and Williams Lansing, "Housing Conditions in Buffalo" in Robert W. DeForest and Lawrence Veiller, eds. *The Tenement House Problem* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1903), 127.

¹²⁶ Marmaduke Humphrey, "A Cycle Show in Little," *Godey's Magazine*, April 1896, 368.

the few. Of course, many urban cyclists could not suddenly afford suburban homes nor had they the leisure time to meander through the park at the fashionable hour, but on bicycles urban riders could drive through the neighboring suburbs and take a spin in an urban park in the evening, on the weekends, or on their way to work. While recreation and exercise had been enjoyed by the leisure class, bicycles enabled a larger group of urban dwellers to indulge in such activities. As a doctor described in 1899, “The bicycle has brought the scenes of country and seashore into the world of the poor, and this extension of environments has much the effect of the vacation of the wealthy, and is a constant source of pleasant anticipation to purify the mind.” And even though wealthy women had taken to certain forms of sport and recreation (e.g., tennis) “...the poor shopgirl received no benefit from it, and it was not until the bicycle had become the most important fixture in the accoutrements of every up-to-date maiden that this class began to realize the virtues...” of recreation.¹²⁷ Particularly, some observers noted, it was the middling classes who knew nothing of the country and the value of leisure: “The wholesome life which is only found near to nature’s uncovered face, was for a few rich women who chose it during certain seasons, and for the uncultured poor who were so close to the ground that they failed to see the sky above as well.”¹²⁸

Recognized as a health-inducing, time-saving, and liberating machine, bicycles appealed to the masses and it was only when, as prices dropped, they were able to join the cycling community that the cycling city came to fruition. That cycling democratized private transportation and that certain city spaces evolved into sites for urbanites representative of a wide range of the socioeconomic spectrum were themes well noticed and broadly praised in the 1890s. Medical authorities heralded the bicycle for enabling men and women of the middle classes,

¹²⁷ *L.A.W. Bulletin and Good Roads Magazine*, February 10, 1899.

¹²⁸ *Munsey’s Magazine*, May 1896, 158.

often confined to indoor work, a chance to enjoy some exercise and fresh air, while others welcomed the thought that the middle classes could now enjoy the “pleasures and amusements of life” once reserved for the wealthier sort alongside those very people.¹²⁹ As described in the *Philadelphia Record*, that city’s Fairmount Park had been transformed by the swells of a cycling army “made up of all classes.” The paper continued that “as one watches the almost endless procession that pass along the drives of Fairmount Park he is struck by the unconventionality and democracy of it all” with riders from various classes “each feeling equal to the other for the time being” and commingling seamlessly.¹³⁰ Many commentators went so far as to claim that the bicycle, by providing the majority of people with their first private vehicle, was the single greatest mechanism to remove class distinction. One writer in *Forum* magazine certainly thought so:

...there is no leveler like the wheel. Every rider feels at liberty to accost or converse with every other rider, not only bound but willing to give him aid in distress or accident, and in various ways to treat the bicycle as the badge of equality among all its possessors...It brings all classes together when all are in a condition of healthy enjoyment and physical content. The artisan, the millionaires, the professional man, the laborer, the rich merchant, the lady whose name appears in all the ‘society movements’ of the day, the shop-girl, the banker and his clerk,--all roll along on equal terms, for a wheel of some kind is within every one’s reach and in outward appearance only the eye of an expert can detect any financial superiority of one over another.¹³¹

This claim and the hundreds of others expressed in cities across the country were predicated on the fact that since so many urban Americans could afford bicycles the social

¹²⁹ *The Physician and Surgeon*, September 1898, 411; “The Secret of the Bike’s Success,” *New Orleans Picayune*, June 14, 1896.

¹³⁰ “The Bicycle as a Social Factor,” *Philadelphia Record*, September 16, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York; Charles Zueblin, “Abolition of Grade Crossings,” *Municipal Affairs*, December 1901, 826-7.

¹³¹ Joseph B. Bishop, “Social and Economic Influence of the Bicycle,” *The Forum*, August, 1896, 683. The bicycle was not, however, the first mode of transportation that seemed to offer the hopes of erasing class antagonism. Some had hoped that mass transit systems, with passengers of different backgrounds rubbing elbows and sharing an intimate space, would produce class “levelism.” Riders, though, more often than not found the experience uncomfortable and antagonizing. Glen E. Holt, “The Changing Perception of Urban Pathology: An Essay on the Development of Mass Transit in the United States,” in Kenneth T. Jackson and Stanley K. Schultz, eds., *Cities in American History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), 325-326.

barriers between classes would subside. A columnist from Albany in 1896 explicitly linked the two. “All classes have wheels” and “it goes without saying that all types of humanity mingle in the saturnalia of wheels.”¹³² In fact, any of the natural barriers that had divided urban population were, supposedly, torn down by the bicycle: “The old distinctions of sex and age seem to have been effaced in the passion for the wheel. Elderly men of the highest respectability and the most conservative social traditions are to be seen on the road, side by side with the dashing young woman in bloomers or the boy who is trying his first wheel.”¹³³

Not only did bicycles serve most classes of urban dwellers, but bicycles also served as one of a number of new transportation options that helped to democratize leisure and exercise. As part of a larger revolution in transportation technology, men and women adopted bicycles alongside other public transit options that brought them to regions that had, through ample distance, separated them from less-mobile (literally and figuratively) urbanites. For example, Coney Island, New York, well removed from the center of the city, had attracted only the wealthy, but in the 1890s a motley group of city dwellers arrived at the sandy shoreline via some combination of railroads, elevateds, horsecars, ferries, or, simply by bicycle.¹³⁴ Within the cities, leisure activities had long been formed along class lines. Theaters, for example, either had sections catering to different classes of patrons or, more likely, the entire theater catered to a particular group of city folk.¹³⁵ Other forms of recreation followed similar paths. In late-nineteenth-century America “the different social classes intermingled as little as possible in their sporting pleasures.” Even as spectators, events generally drew a relatively similar

¹³² “Two Rivals in the Park,” *Albany Press Knickerbockers*, June 14, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

¹³³ “Influence of the Wheel,” *Albany Press Knickerbockers*, June 29, 1896, in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

¹³⁴ John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 1978, 29-37.

¹³⁵ Stuart M. Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 144.

socioeconomic crowd and when the crowd was more diverse, ticket prices served to segregate the spectators into cordoned off sections.¹³⁶ In theaters, arenas, and on city streets, the urban world was a stratified one. As the historian Stuart Blumin wrote, “In the evening as well as during the workday, the city was sorting its classes of people into increasingly distinct institutions and spaces.”¹³⁷ And even as cities became increasingly diverse, wealthier classes found ways to distance themselves from the general population.

Moving “uptown,” and eventually to the suburbs, provided a comfortable space, but with transportation technology advancing, such separation grew harder and harder to maintain.¹³⁸ Urban parks, often designed as segregated spaces for a particular segment of the urban populace, became playgrounds for riders who could only afford to rent a bicycle by the hour as much as for the urban elite.¹³⁹ Some affluent cyclists certainly resented the class-mixing. The bicycle was no longer the standalone symbol of wealth and prestige that it once was. Some young men, scouting for future wives, complained that the bicycle could no longer serve as a guarantee of good pedigree or wealthy parents. Of course, clothes and manners might serve to distinguish riders, but affluent cyclists found an easier way to differentiate themselves: flashy bicycles.

In 1897, Tiffany’s offered its customers machines studded with gold and silver and accessories plated in precious metals. The prices for some of the custom bicycles surpassed \$500, a sum easily ten times the price of a new bicycle.¹⁴⁰ Trendsetters, like the famed actress, singer, and embodiment of feminine beauty Lillian Russell, could be seen riding in a flock of

¹³⁶ Riess, *City Games*, 5.

¹³⁷ Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class*, 146.

¹³⁸ Once transportation was truly democratized, elites found other ways to preserve their segregated residential communities. In the twentieth century housing covenants and redlining were just some of the tools used to preserve the homogenous mix of certain residential districts. More recently, the popularization of gated communities signifies the idea of spatial distancing from certain undesirable groups.

¹³⁹ Baldwin, *Domesticating the Street*, 116-117

¹⁴⁰ Raymond H. Clarybooks, *The Making of Golden Gate Park: The Early Years: 1865-1906* (San Francisco: California Living, 1980), 75.

society's who's-who bedecked in the latest fashion and atop bicycles plated in gold. At the other end of the socioeconomic spectrum, workers and artisans mounted lower-budget, utility bicycles. These types of machines, an example of which one manufacturer in France appropriately christened the *démocratique*, offered a functional no frills alternative on which to transport oneself around the city.¹⁴¹ No matter the decorative features or sporty accessories, bicycles, above all, enhanced urban mobility.

Mobility had long been a privilege enjoyed by a select group of the metropolitan elite; but with bicycles, in addition to other forms of public transit, mobility became more, even if not completely, democratized. While the bicycle certainly did not demolish the markings of class, the fact that so many contemporaries thought (or at least hoped) that the bicycle was accomplishing that very thing reveals an acute awareness, and for some a concern, about the growing rift among urban Americans and a desire to bridge the ever-widening gap between classes. Others, especially a segment of the urban elite, had a very different perspective.

Aside from promenading down boulevards, cruising gently through well-manicured parks, flaunting their stylized bicycles and chic clothes, and literally moving away from the lower classes, wealthy and upper middle-class urbanites also used bicycle clubs to distance themselves from ordinary cyclists.¹⁴² In general, voluntary associations, like sporting clubs, organized around a single interest, first gained widespread popularity in the early nineteenth century.

¹⁴¹ Christopher Thompson, *The Tour de France: A Cultural History* (University of California Press, 2006), 11.

¹⁴² For more on how certain cyclists, in this case middle and well-to-do urbanites, used bicycles as a means to connote status see, Daniel London, "Keeping a Respectable Distance: The Rise and Fall of the Bicycle as an instrument of Gentility" in Gary W. Sanderson, ed., *Cycle History 20* (Cheltenham, England: John Pinkerton Memorial Publishing Fund, 2010).

Societies devoted to religion, temperance, anti-slavery, and other reforms joined dozens of clubs centered on books, sport, and other pastimes.¹⁴³ Toward the end of the nineteenth century, club life expanded exponentially. As cities grew into impersonal webs of traffic and bureaucracy, residents hungered for ways to create more personal, social communities. Clubs did just that. They provided members a way to identify themselves as part of a distinct group and a way to classify themselves amid millions of human beings, a way to nest in the chaotic forest of urbanity. In the latter decades of the nineteenth century many societies sprouted to accommodate the growing number of disciples of America's newest fascination: bicycles. The story behind the bicycle clubs and their evolution reveals much about the expanding base of urban cyclists as well as the opportunities and limitations that bicycles provided for their urban owners.

The first clubs, formed by early adopters of the high-wheel bicycle, represented a very select group of generally young, well-to-do men.¹⁴⁴ As a club spokesman from such a bicycle club in New Orleans described, since essentially all of the early cyclists in the 1880s came from the wealthier classes, the composition of their membership inherently reflected as much: "The fundamental principle, that personal ownership of a wheel is a requisite for membership, acts in itself as a sort of check against indiscriminate applications for admission."¹⁴⁵ But as the high-wheelers disappeared and as the safety bicycle found its way into the mainstream, a new set of clubs emerged at an astounding pace. By 1896, Manhattan alone counted more than fifty clubs and Chicago had fifty-four encompassing some 10,000 cyclists, while every other major

¹⁴³ Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class*, 192.

¹⁴⁴ For more on these early bicycle clubs see, Norman L. Dunham, "The Bicycle Era in American History" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1956), 196-204.

¹⁴⁵ Somers, "A city on Wheels," 223.

American city had dozens of bicycle-centered associations.¹⁴⁶ To be sure, many of these groups continued to cater to the wealthy. In general, the vast majority of bicycle clubs organized in the 1890s were almost always formed along class lines and to a lesser extent according to ethnicity, race, and gender. Club organizers devised an application process in order to weed out any potential undesirables. Even the national associations, like the League of American Wheelmen (L.A.W.), which often bragged about its ever-swelling membership rolls, had its limitations. As the membership office advertised, “The league wants members in large numbers, but it does not want everybody.”¹⁴⁷ As it further explained, the L.A.W. reminded its members that the “good name” of the organization must be kept intact by keeping “freaky” and “woozy” applicants at bay.¹⁴⁸ On the local level, in citywide clubs where membership in a particular club might have carried with it a significant reputation, recruiting was a delicate process. Applications generally required candidates to list their occupations, membership fees could be used to dissuade lower-class members from joining (one exclusive club, for example, charged an \$100 initiation fee¹⁴⁹), and perhaps most firmly, clubs generally mandated that all new members be vouched for by an existing member (and of course current members often had significant veto power to deny membership¹⁵⁰). Since these voluntary associations were, after all, designed to bring people together around a common interest and since it was the commonalities that provided the initial attraction to join a club, it is not particularly surprising that the members came from similar

¹⁴⁶ *New York Bicycle Directory* (New York: New Bicycle Directory Publishing Co., 1896); *Brooklyn Daily Eagle Almanac*, Vol. X (Brooklyn: Press of Brooklyn Daily Eagle Book and Job Department, 1895), 118-120; Encyclopedia of Chicago, “Bicycling,” <<http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/136.html>> (accessed 19 September 2009).

¹⁴⁷ *Fifty Miles Around New York* (New York: The New York State Division of the League of American Wheelmen, 1896).

¹⁴⁸ “Don’t Ask Them to Join,” *L.A.W. Bulletin and Good Roads Magazine*, July 3, 1896, 9.

¹⁴⁹ Riess, *City Games*, 57.

¹⁵⁰ See, for example, the Articles of Incorporation of Citizens Bicycle Club, New-York Historical Society, New York; MS 383, Box 3 Folder 2 Constitution and By-Laws of the Century Cycle Club, Howard S. Fisk Bicycle Club Collection, 1887, 1895-1905, The Historical Society of Washington, D.C. Historical Society.

ethnic groups and social milieus. As an article about local cycling clubs in *Outing* magazine reported: “Their center of attraction arises from the similarity of the individuals in personal aims, in social instincts, in opinion...”¹⁵¹ To codify the sameness, organizations often required their members to don club uniforms. One early club explained to its members that there would be little leeway when it came to appearance:

[The uniform] shall be a Norfolk Jacket and Knee Breeches of Citizens Club Clot, gray Flannel Shirt, navy blue Necktie with white polka dot, citizens Club Stockings, black low Shoes, and a regulation navy Cap, of same clothes suit, with turn down visor and a black silk cord (except in the case of the Captain and lieutenants, who shall wear silver) and the Club Badge of silver (as designed by Mr. Phillip Fontaine) affixed to the front. The summer hat shall be a white Helmet with the Club Badge affixed to the front, to be worn when directed by the Commanding Officer...Each active member shall, within thirty days after his election, provide himself with a complete Uniform, which must be inspected and approved by the Captain.¹⁵²

Strangely, selecting the uniforms seemed to always be one of the most contentious aspects when starting a bicycle club.¹⁵³

One group particularly keen on joining clubs with those like-minded and like-moneyed was the urban elite. Interestingly, they had been on the sidelines during the earliest years of the bicycle craze. Yes, the cost of early bicycles limited its followers to a very select group. But the adventuresome early adopters did not fit neatly among the upper-crust of the urban elite. Especially so were those early riders who braved the challenge of mounting and steadying the high-wheelers and participating in such an alien activity. While they had enough money to purchase an expensive luxury good, they did not necessarily move within the most elite circles of the city. In the beginning, cycling demanded a certain amount of money, but it had not yet become fashionable among the social leaders of the city. Early riders, then, represented but a

¹⁵¹ A.H. Godfrey, “Cycling Clubs and Their Spheres of Action,” *Outing*, July 1897, 342-350.

¹⁵² Articles of Incorporation and By-Laws of the Citizens Bicycle Club of the City of New York, 1883, New-York Historical Society.

¹⁵³ MS 383, Minutes of Meetings of the Century Cycle Club, Howard S. Fisk Bicycle Club Collection, 1887, 1895-1905, The Historical Society of Washington, D.C. Historical Society.

particular subset of the affluent as the bicycle was not initially accepted as a fashionable item among the ultra-elite. In fact, the “society world” was at first, as one writer chronicled, “rather disposed to grumble at [cyclists] as a nuisance, and to silently approve all measures to restrict their privileges.”¹⁵⁴ The earliest riders represented more of a fringe element of the moneyed classes and certainly not representative of the Rockefeller’s or the Gould’s who eventually joined, albeit in unique ways (e.g., partaking in elaborate bicycle “dances” performed in concert with live orchestras and spectated by their fancy friends in overhanging balconies), the bicycle mania.¹⁵⁵

Ironically, it was only when bicycle prices began to drop and the number of cyclists mushroomed that those urbanites collectively referred to as members of the “society” took to bicycling. In what one contemporary article called “a marked reversal of the usual order of things,” cycling was picked up by the “the masses before it was taken up by society.”¹⁵⁶ Of course, the price had nothing to do with it. In fact, urban elites could and did choose from an ever-growing luxury bicycle market. The reality was that primarily young, urban, daring, often single, men were the first to take to cycling. What followed were two separate phenomena. For the middling-classes and eventually working classes, prices dropped and second-hand markets exploded throughout the 1890s. At the very same time, the activity became more fashionable. The result was that two new groups of cyclists, from two opposite ends of the socio-economic spectrum joined the ranks of cyclists.

It was really not until the mid-1890s that the “fashionable” men and women of American society became cyclists. Partly, at least, their enthusiasm was spurred on by news from abroad,

¹⁵⁴ James B. Townsend, “The Social Side of Bicycling,” *Scribner’s Magazine*, June 1895, 704-705.

¹⁵⁵ *Munsey’s Magazine*, May 1896, 155.

¹⁵⁶ *Munsey’s Magazine*, May 1896, 155. See also, “A Point of View,” *Scribner’s Magazine*, October 1894, 527.

especially in Paris, where the “best” men and women had adopted the sport.¹⁵⁷ The arrival of bicycles in Newport, the upscale summer resort for New Yorkers, signified that the American elite had begun to follow their European counterparts.¹⁵⁸ From Newport to the cities, wealthy urbanites, who had no day jobs to commute to and who had long enjoyed the relative freedom of mobility found their own ways to enjoy cycling.

Primarily, these riders used the bicycle as a means of social engagement and as yet another way to cement their membership in the upper-crust. The most obvious outcomes of these efforts came in the form of the dozens of exclusive bicycle clubs that dotted America’s leading cities. Their clubhouses surely included rooms to store, clean, and repair bicycles, but the rest of the building generally had few overt signs of its bicycle heritage. At some houses, libraries, card rooms, and billiard tables kept members busy while dumb-waiters shuffled food from kitchen hands to hungry cyclists. One of the more palatial headquarters even included a barber shop, a writing room, several bowling-alleys, steward’s quarters, executive offices, a gymnasium, and plenty of “cozy nooks.”¹⁵⁹ Bicycle clubhouses offered much more than just a starting point for a Sunday “run” to the country or a table for a post-ride meal; they were sites for social interaction and display, homes for elaborate “stag smokers,” midnight galas, tea parties, but also places governed by strict rules.¹⁶⁰ The Illinois Cycling Club, for example, forbade its members from gambling or drinking on the premises and engaging in any kind of what it termed “ungentlemanly conduct.” It specifically warned its members to exercise caution when bringing

¹⁵⁷ Townsend, “The Social Side of Bicycling,” 704-705.

¹⁵⁸ “The Wheel at Newport,” *Bicycling World*, August 30, 1895, 581; Montgomery, *Displaying Women*.

¹⁵⁹ *Illinois Cycling Club Life*, May 1895.

¹⁶⁰ *Dash*, August 31, 1895.

guests to the clubhouse who might detract from the “respectable crowd that make up our audience.”¹⁶¹

At a time when cycling had peaked in popularity, these elite riders insisted that cycling was much more than just a mode of transportation. For everyday cyclists, it may have been just that—the easiest way to get from A to B, but these cyclists used bicycles for different purposes entirely. With so many people riding bicycles, it became ever more important to advertise themselves as recreational/social riders, not the utilitarian sort, especially the scorcher. Those who sped around the city, darting around corners with their hunched backs, represented everything elite riders hoped to avoid. They had a well-deserved bad reputation for recklessness and audacity. Their actions, at least theoretically, threatened to endanger the reputation of cyclists as a whole. So it is not surprising that so many elite riders spoke so ardently against these “lesser” riders. “It is most unfortunate that so many ruffians should have been attracted to this charming exercise, and should degrade it by reckless riding and insolent indifference to the comfort of other users of the road” one rider complained. “The young men who race along our public streets and country lanes in insufficient clothing at something over fifteen miles an hour should be promptly dealt with and suppressed, as some noxious parasite that has taken lodging in a fair flower...”¹⁶²

As cities and their populations grew exponentially, it became more and more important for the urban elite to find new ways to differentiate themselves from others, including scorchers. In order to create and preserve their sub-communities, to maintain segregated spaces, to participate in elite activities, and to demonstrate their status, bicycle clubs served their purposes. To that end, many bicycle clubs published their own magazines, disseminating not only news

¹⁶¹ *Illinois Cycling Club Life*, December 1896; *Illinois Cycling Club Life*, June 1899.

¹⁶² E.H. Lacon Watson, “Bicycle Tours—and a Moral,” *Westminster Review*, July to December 1894, 168.

about upcoming bicycle-related events, but even more so about the social affairs of the club and its members.¹⁶³ Perhaps best epitomizing the elite class of cycling clubs was New York's Michaux Cycle Club, named after the French inventor credited with adding pedals to bicycles, for which membership was widely sought and rarely given. The club's "fashionable cycling set," which included prominent architects, colonels, captains of industry and their wives, enjoyed riding classes in the morning, bicycle dances in the afternoon, sipping tea inside the club's headquarters, and knowing that they had won entrance into an exclusive club that brought with it what one reporter called "social cachet of the most authoritative sort."¹⁶⁴ (figure 4.3) Other elite organizations, athletically oriented or otherwise, began catering to their cycling members. The well-known New York Athletic Club and Boston Athletic Club each spawned auxiliary bicycle groups and New York's ultra-exclusive Metropolitan Club, organized without an athletic bent, housed some 200 bicycles for its fat cats.

¹⁶³ See, for example *Dash* the club paper of the Lake View Cycling Club in Chicago and *The Scorcher* the club paper for the South Side Cycling Club also in Chicago.

¹⁶⁴ "Society's Cycling Club," *New York Times*, December 10, 1894; *Munsey's Magazine*, May 1896, 155.

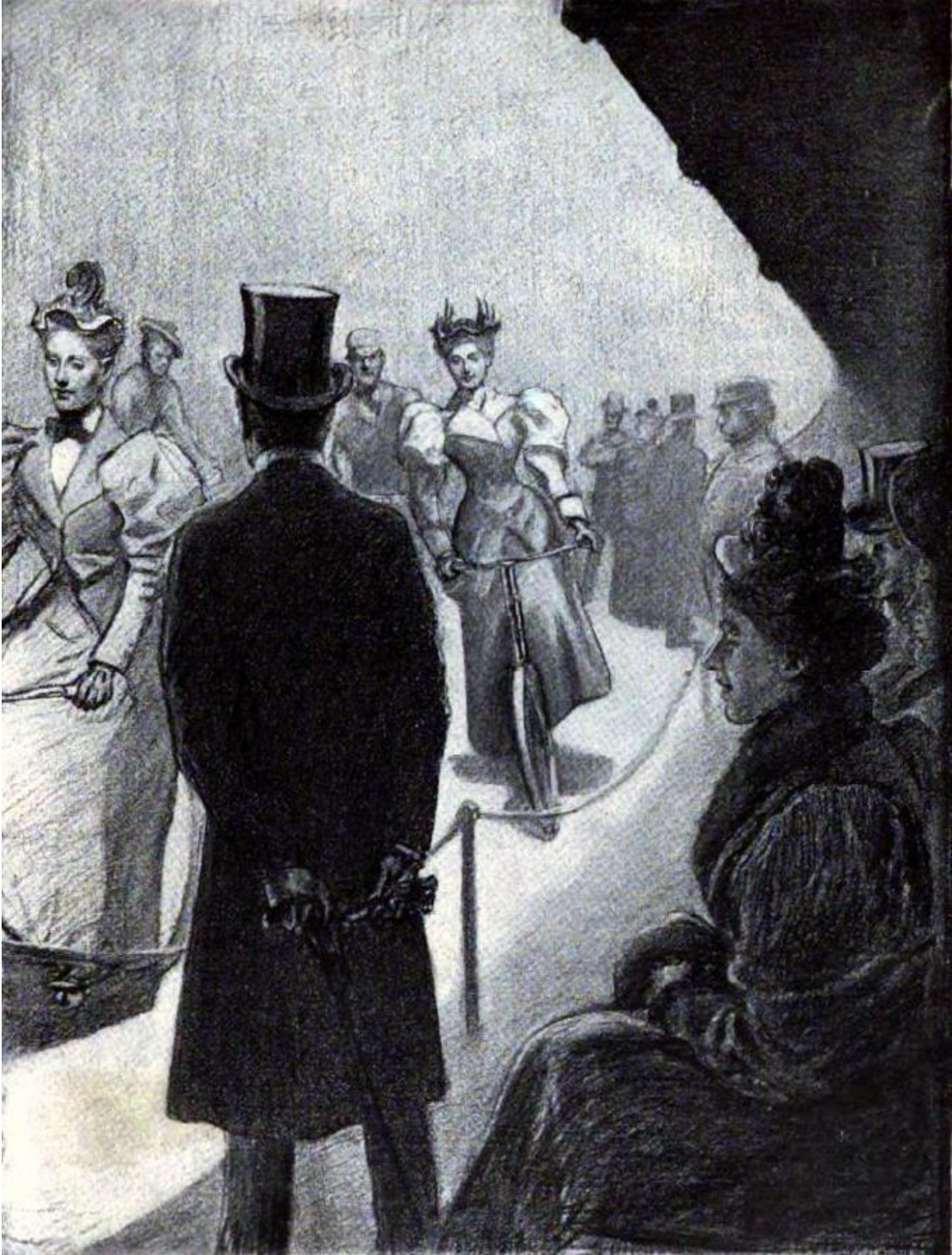


Figure 4.3: Above is an image from the Michaux Cycling Club, New York's and perhaps the nation's most exclusive bicycle club. Members typically rode (or spectated) indoors at the club's glamorous academy located at Manhattan's Broadway and 52nd Street. Source: *Scribner's Magazine*, June 1895, 709.

For these well-heeled cyclists just as other club members, the bicycle served as a means of identification—a status symbol. For urban elites, the city served as a “cultural map, where classes distinguished themselves by the clothes they wore, the shops they frequented, the parks they strolled in, and the houses they inhabited...” and with bicycles enjoyed by the masses, upper class riders found exclusive cycling clubs a convenient way to differentiate their cycling activities from the larger urban community.¹⁶⁵ Wealthy urbanites might join several clubs, each different from the others, but each devoted to a group that shared either a similar ancestry, political bent, cultural taste, social philosophy, or interest in sport.¹⁶⁶ Just as other voluntary associations started cropping up in the late nineteenth century, these prestigious bicycle clubs allowed wealthy riders to congregate and identify within a very select group.

Similarly, all sorts of cyclists who could never attain membership in their city’s most august organizations started their own associations of like-minded riders. As Steven Riess has argued, club “members either wanted to separate themselves from other (inferior or different) social groups or else were themselves cut off by others and thus could only associate with athletes of similar backgrounds.”¹⁶⁷ Consequently, throughout the 1890s, clubs for bicycle enthusiasts catered to nearly every age, class, ethnicity, and gender, albeit most often in homogenous groups. In Chicago, female cyclists formed three clubs of their own, while many of the larger, male clubs included auxiliary units just for women.¹⁶⁸ While bicycles still remained a luxury good for the working-class and while club membership was certainly not something that those without a modicum of discretionary income and leisure time would seek, many alternative

¹⁶⁵ Mona Domosh, *Invented Cities: The Creation of Landscape in Nineteenth-Century New York & Boston* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 156.

¹⁶⁶ David Hammack, *Power and Society: Greater New York at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1982), 72.

¹⁶⁷ Riess, *City Games*, 8.

¹⁶⁸ “The Power of the Wheel,” *New York Journal*, June 19, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York. Some clubs specifically barred women from joining. “Women Riders Barred,” *Wheel Life*, March 17, 1898.

bicycle clubs had a far more inviting application process than the most prestigious clubs. The Century Cycle Club, in Washington, D.C., for example, only charged its members fifty cents in dues, a far cry from the \$50 that some other clubs required.¹⁶⁹

Groups organized around a shared ethnic identity proliferated as well. In New York, the bicycle craze penetrated Chinatown, which had its own riding school and a growing number of cyclists.¹⁷⁰ As early as 1892, an octet of Chinese-American riders in New York organized themselves into the New York Mongolians. Emanating from New York's Chinatown, the group took recreational tours of the city and its nearby environs.¹⁷¹ Likewise, in 1895, a group of Chinese cycling enthusiasts in Philadelphia formed that city's first Chinese wheelmen's club. The aptly named First Chinese Bicycle Club of Philadelphia maintained its own club headquarters and riding academy.¹⁷² Chinese Americans represented but one of many immigrant communities that enjoyed urban cycling and that formed their own bicycle clubs. In New York, the "Hinode Bicycle Club" consisted of a small group of Japanese-American businessmen who participated in citywide cycling parades and who earned distinction as one of the "best uniformed" clubs.¹⁷³ In Brooklyn, the "Norsemen's Cycle Club," which invited all children of "Harold the Fair-Haired" to join, comprised but one portion, along with the Danish and the Monitor Cycle Club, of the Scandinavian Associated Cycling Club.¹⁷⁴ And in Chicago, the German Wheelmen maintained an active presence, while Polish-American and Cuban-American cyclists from that same city joined thousands of other riders in an 1898 lantern-lit bicycle parade

¹⁶⁹ MS 383, Folder 3, Minutes of Meetings of the Century Cycle Club in Howard S. Fisk Bicycle Club Collection, 1887, 1895-1905, The Historical Society of Washington, D.C.; Riess, *City Games*, 57.

¹⁷⁰ "Bicycling in Chinatown," *Morning World-Herald* (Omaha), August 3, 1895.

¹⁷¹ "Chinese Wheelmen," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 1, 1892.

¹⁷² "Chinamen Will Take to the Wheel," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 16, 1895.

¹⁷³ "Gossip of the Cyclers," *New York Times*, September 19, 1897; "In the Cycling World," *New York Tribune*, May 30, 1897.

¹⁷⁴ "Of Interest to Wheelmen," *New York City Daily Mercury*, June 19, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York; "Fifteen 'Grinders' Left," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, December 11, 1897.

that was filled with pageantry, led by the city's cycling mayor, and watched by President McKinley.¹⁷⁵

In one respect, ethnic-oriented bicycle clubs provided immigrants with an opportunity to participate in overtly public activities and an overtly American phenomenon. Their clubs, in purpose and form, mimicked the hundreds of other bicycle clubs. When taking a group ride around the city or participating in a local bicycle race, Chinese-American wheelmen, Polish-American wheelmen and every other kind of wheelmen were wheelmen much like any other rider. Clearly, certain ethnic groups, like a cohort of Chinese riders who advertised that its members would dress according to the prevailing fashion, hoped that cycling would provide somewhat of an assimilative experience.¹⁷⁶ After all, these groups employed bicycles for more than commuting, but also as a medium of social engagement, a way to participate in a cultural phenomenon, and a means to be included in mainstream civic events and public demonstrations. So much so that the *Los Angeles Times* pronounced "The Wheel a Splendid Factor in Developing Citizenship."¹⁷⁷ Indeed, participating in popular forms of recreation and leisure was a common way for immigrant groups to experience Americanization.¹⁷⁸ But this was certainly not a case of simple assimilation. The large-scale urban cycling parades were emblematic of the kinds of opportunities (and limitations) that cycling offered immigrant groups. In these grand parades, cyclists would wheel their way through the city, organized in distinct groups according to their club affiliation. On the one hand that might mean that the Norsemen's Cycle Club or the New York Mongolians would be riding alongside tens of thousands of other riders, mostly from the

¹⁷⁵ "Entry Blanks are Out," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 25, 1897; "Route of the Bicycle Parade," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 16, 1898.

¹⁷⁶ "Chinamen Will Take to the Wheel," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 16, 1895.

¹⁷⁷ "Reform by the Bicycle. The Wheel A Splendid Factor in Developing Citizenship," *Los Angeles Times*, July 26, 1896.

¹⁷⁸ Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 31.

white, urban middle-class, and in some ways, like parades often do, express a community solidarity, but on the other hand they would also be doing so within a segregated group: in other words, dozens and dozens of relatively segregated, homogenous groups embedded within a much larger, heterogeneous parade.¹⁷⁹ The parades reflected the city itself, a remarkably diverse place, but a world in which neighborhoods continued to segregate the population.

Similarly, in the bicycle races in which many cycling clubs participated, individual heats or races would often be segregated along ethnic or racial lines. And although spectators largely enjoyed watching, and the press regularly reported about “colored” or “Chinese” racers, their reactions frequently focused on the physical differences among the riders. Few of the press reports on such events, such as a characteristic 1894 *Los Angeles Times* article that promised its readers a titillating race between the “almond-eyed wheelmen,” failed to point out the stereotypical physical differences of ethnic riders.¹⁸⁰

Aside from bicycle clubs, another indication of the universality of cycling was the devotion to cycling-related issues in ethnic newspapers. In the *American Hebrew*, advertisements for bicycles ran comfortably alongside those for kosher meat.¹⁸¹ Its readers could also expect a steady dose of bicycle-related news, fiction, humor, and editorial comment. Likewise, the *American Jewess*, an 1890s periodical written for Jewish women, joined in the national debates about the appropriateness of wearing bloomers (even though bloomers were ugly, the editors argued, they represented less of a taboo than the scantily clad women on the beach), cycling as a form of exercise for women (it was highly recommended so long as it was practiced moderately and “gently”), Charlotte Smith and her anti-women-cycling-brigade (she

¹⁷⁹ Susan G. Davis, *Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1986), 3.

¹⁸⁰ “The Field Day,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 30, 1894.

¹⁸¹ *The American Hebrew*, June 19, 1896, 169. See also, *The Jewish Criterion*, which likewise featured advertisements and articles about bicycles and cycling.

clearly “o’erleaped the mark”), and the overall value of bicycling for women (“...women should ride the wheel, if they wish health, pleasure and happiness...”).¹⁸²

Other media outlets followed a similar model. Spanish language newspapers in Las Cruces, Los Angeles, New York, El Paso, and Albuquerque featured scores of bicycle advertisements, articles about the effects of “ciclomania,” and stories, just like the thousands in the English-language papers, that extolled the bicycle as a means to escape the city, as a social-leveler, as a tool for practical transportation and healthful exercise, and as one of the greatest and most promising inventions ever created.¹⁸³ German-language newspapers, too, could hardly ignore the craze.¹⁸⁴ Cycling had truly become an American phenomenon, which meant, by the end of the nineteenth century as more than half of the population in the country’s twelve largest cities were either foreign born or the children of foreign born parents,¹⁸⁵ that it included many ethnic groups and some recent immigrants.

¹⁸² “Editor’s Desk,” *American Jewess*, July 1895; “Cycling as an Exercise for Women,” *American Jewess*, April 1897; “The Woman Who Talks,” *American Jewess*, September 1896; “Why Women Should Ride the Wheel,” *American Jewess*, June 1896.

¹⁸³ “Bicicletas,” *Nuevo Mundo* (Albuquerque), June 5, 1897; “Para los ciclistas,” *Clarín del Norte* (El Paso), August 11, 1906; “La Bicicleta,” *Empresa* (Las Cruces), January 23, 1897; “La Bicicleta y Su Teoría,” *Dos Republicas* (Los Angeles), August 15, 1896.

¹⁸⁴ See, for example, the series of articles included in *Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs*, New-York Historical Society, New York.

¹⁸⁵ Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 123.



A perfect fitting Corset for general wear as well as for all athletic exercises. The only Corset that gives support without impeding the perfect movement of the body. No brass eyelets. Sizes 18 to 30. For sale at all leading dry goods stores, Price \$1.00, or sent anywhere postpaid upon receipt of price. Made in white, drab or black.

Chicago Corset Co. CHICAGO and NEW YORK

Figure 4.4: Featured above is an advertisement for cycling clothes as featured in the American Jewess magazine. Source: Advertisement, *American Jewess*, March 1896.



Compre la Bicicleta
STERLING

*Especialmente á propósito para el comercio de la América del Sur.

Fuerte, Ligero, Rígido, Seguro.

Todas las piezas son permutables. Pidase el Catálogo.

Sterling Cycle Works, Chicago, Ill., E. U. A.

An advertisement for a Sterling bicycle. It features a side-view illustration of a bicycle with a diamond frame, spoked wheels, a chain drive, and a seat. The text is in Spanish and English. The main heading is 'Compre la Bicicleta' followed by 'STERLING' in large, bold letters. Below that, it says '*Especialmente á propósito para el comercio de la América del Sur.' and 'Fuerte, Ligero, Rígido, Seguro.' in bold. At the bottom, it says 'Todas las piezas son permutables. Pidase el Catálogo.' and 'Sterling Cycle Works, Chicago, Ill., E. U. A.'

Figure 4.5: Above is an advertisement for a Sterling Bicycle, described in Spanish as Strong, Light, Rigid, Safe. Source: Advertisement, *Cacara Jicara* (New York), November 13, 1897.

Often excluded from local clubs, black cyclists were also determined to form their own organizations.¹⁸⁶ Baltimore's Uptown Cycle Club; Louisville's Union Cycle Club; Washington D.C.'s the Capital League Wheelmen, the Hannibals, and the Ideal; Boise's Thompson Street Colored Bicycle Club; New York's Calumet Cyclers; and Los Angeles's Nonpareils represented just some of the "Colored Wheelmen" of their respective cities.¹⁸⁷ When the League of American Wheelmen officially barred blacks from joining by adding the word "white" to the list of requirements for membership in 1894, black members found that their membership badges no longer afforded them access to L.A.W. meetings and events and would-be L.A.W. members found their membership applications denied.¹⁸⁸ Black cyclists from northern cities, who had been members of the L.A.W., pled with the organization's Northern members who, as J. Spencer, Captain of the New York's largest all-black cycling club, the Calumet Cyclers, put it, "sympathize with our cause." In his defense, Spencer argued that "none but colored men of the best class ride bicycles, and they are no more objectionable than German or Irish wheelmen."¹⁸⁹ Class, Spencer argued unsuccessfully, should trump race. Likewise the cycling publication read across Northern cities, the *American Wheelmen*, questioned the drawing of the color line: "Why they should be so treated does not appear since they pay the same annual dues and are entitled to all the privileges the others enjoy. The action of the meet promoters shows an animosity or bigotry that is ill befitting this lightened age."¹⁹⁰ Regardless of the mixed northern opinion, local

¹⁸⁶ See, for example, "Colored Wheelmen Barred," *New York Times*, September 10, 1892.

¹⁸⁷ "Watermelon for Colored Wheelmen," *The Washington Post*, August 14, 1897; "Colored Cyclers to form a League," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 16, 1895; "Colored Wheelmen's Reception," *New York Times*, February 19, 1897; "The Bicycle a Boon," *Idaho Statesman*, October 4, 1896; "Colored Crackjacks," *Los Angeles Times*, November 27, 1895.

¹⁸⁸ Andrew Ritchie "The League of American Wheelmen, Major Taylor and the 'Color Question' in the United States in the 1890s" *Sport in Society*, 6, no. 2-3 (June/October 2003): 20-23. See also, Lorenz J. Finison, "African-American Cycling in 1890s: Boston and What Really Happened at Asbury Park," in Sanderson, *Cycle History* 20.

¹⁸⁹ "Negro Cyclists Plead for Membership in the League of American Wheelmen," *New York Journal*, February 3, 1898.

¹⁹⁰ *American Wheelmen*, August 13, 1896, 17.

chapters of the L.A.W. in the South simply would not compromise when it came to, as the delegation from Louisiana characterized it, “forcing obnoxious company upon southern wheelmen.”¹⁹¹

As Jim Crow laws swept across Southern cities and as the Supreme Court in *Plessy v. Ferguson* endorsed the constitutionality of racial segregation, so too did the L.A.W. exclude black cyclists. As a result of the “agitation” this caused, cyclists from several large cities banded together to form the District Associated Wheelmen.¹⁹² Although this group did not quite achieve the original lofty goal to create a parallel, national organization, the formation of the Colored League of American Wheelmen (or a “L.A.W. unto Themselves” as the *Los Angeles Times* termed it) was reason enough to celebrate.¹⁹³ White wheelmen, the *Washington Post* reported, “may save themselves lots of trouble” by not trying to participate in this retaliatory parade, which came on the heels of a specific resolution that forbade black cyclists from participating in the L.A.W. parade.¹⁹⁴ And so on an October night in 1896 several hundred black wheelmen rode on a five mile route around the nation’s capital, most carrying Chinese lanterns, many wearing elaborate costumes, and a good number decked out as “Uncle Sam.”¹⁹⁵ Perhaps the black cyclists who dressed as Uncle Sam—the very man who personified the United States—and participated in a parade at once protesting their exclusion and celebrating their resolve, might have been mocking the hypocrisy of American liberty or perhaps reveling in that very promise. Either way, they did so in what was becoming a ritualized American activity—cycling.

¹⁹¹ Somers, “A City on Wheels,” 225.

¹⁹² “Race on Conduit Road,” *The Washington Post*, October 11, 1896.

¹⁹³ “With the Subjects of King Bicycle,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 9, 1896; “Colored Wheelmen to Organize,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 19, 1894; “A L.A.W. unto Themselves,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 4, 1895.

¹⁹⁴ “Schade is at the Top,” *The Washington Post*, October 19, 1896.

¹⁹⁵ “Colored Wheelmen Parade” *The Washington Post*, October 21, 1896.

Without the glare of Chinese lanterns or dazzling costumes, black cyclists rode to work and for pleasure without much fanfare in many cities. Black newspapers, like the *Baltimore Afro-American*, just like the mainstream press, maintained coverage about all things bicycles and regularly featured advertisements for bicycles and bicycle accessories.¹⁹⁶ Like all other urban Americans, black women and men, old and young, could be seen riding through Chicago, Boston, Birmingham, or any other sizeable city. The *New York Herald* recorded that black cyclists maintained a regular presence in New York and especially its main cycling thoroughfare, the Boulevard.

Where can one find a more picturesque sight than the array of colored men on wheels? There is a vast army of them. Where on earth they come from nobody knows, but there they are, by scores and hundreds. Colored women, too, abound. They wheel as well and dress as tastefully as their white sisters. The men are usually altogether past criticism... Truly they are all that, and if any philosopher feels dismal over the future of the Afro-American race let him visit the Boulevard and see its representatives as they whiz past.¹⁹⁷

To be sure, the ways in which black riders adopted the bicycle and the degree to which black cyclists were accepted varied heavily from region to region and city to city, but it was not completely unusual, for example, for a contingent of black riders to participate in a citywide parade, as they did in Northern cities, filled with cyclists of varied ethnic and racial backgrounds.¹⁹⁸ Black riders, like other leisure cyclists, would also take tours of the neighboring countryside or longer trips to other cities. When one group of black riders from New York finished their 100-mile ride that ended with a tour through Philadelphia's Fairmount Park, they reported, in what was presented as less than striking news, of having been treated well.¹⁹⁹ Nor was it unusual for mainstream city papers, like the *Washington Post*, to regularly report on the

¹⁹⁶ See, for example, "Isaac B. Potter," *Baltimore Afro-American*, April 9, 1898; *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 9, 1898,

¹⁹⁷ "Where Wheel Men Abound," *New York Herald*, September 16, 1894.

¹⁹⁸ See, for example, "The Cycle Parade" *New York Tribune*, July 13, 1902.

¹⁹⁹ "Fourth of July Dull in the Park," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 29, 1900.

activities of black cyclists in the same manner as it did on cycling issues in general. It seemed that cycling among urban blacks must have been commonplace enough not to warrant special attention. News reports about “Negro” or “Colored” cyclists almost never remarked that such riders were a rarity or a phenomenon, but rather messengers, commuters, racers, club members, and leisure riders like every one else. One traffic survey counted an average of “134 colored” commuters who regularly cycled to work in Chicago.²⁰⁰ Surely, the total number of Chicago’s black cyclists was many times larger. And although it is impossible to ascertain the veracity, one cycling club captain counted 2,000 black riders among New York City’s army of wheelmen.²⁰¹

Nevertheless, prejudice did abound. The majority of newspaper articles that contained any reference to everyday black cyclists recounted incidents of traffic accidents. Typical headlines read “Negro Cyclist Ran into Lady;” “More ‘Scorcher’ Victims: A Fast-Riding Negro Cyclist Ran down Two Children Yesterday Afternoon;” “Run over by a Colored Bicyclist;” and “Reckless Negro Bicyclist...under Arrest for Running down Mrs. Robinson.”²⁰²

Disproportionately in the press, “colored bicyclists” ran down whites. On the streets, undoubtedly, it went both ways. More than occasionally, newspapers also caricatured black cyclists along the lines of dominant negative stereotypes.²⁰³ Outside of the press, blacks, like other non-white cyclists, found few clubs (the L.A.W. or otherwise) willing to have them, few parades that welcomed them, and few cycling races that would not bar or segregate black

²⁰⁰ This was the only traffic survey I found that differentiated between “colored” and the rest of the cycling population. While some black Chicagoans cycled to work their numbers paled in comparison to that of the white population. “Utilitarian Side of Cycling,” *Cycle Age and Trade Review*, September 22, 1898, 602.

²⁰¹ “Negro Cyclists Plead for Membership in the League of American Wheelmen,” *New York Journal*, February 3, 1898.

²⁰² “Negro Cyclist Ran into Lady,” *Columbus Daily Enquirer*, October 20, 1901; More ‘Scorcher’ Victims: A Fast-Riding Negro Cyclist Ran down Two Children Yesterday Afternoon,” *Kansas City Star*, April 15, 1899; “Run over by a Colored Bicyclist,” *Sun* (Baltimore), June 22, 1897; “Reckless Negro Bicyclist: He is under Arrest for Running down Mrs. Robinson,” *St. Louis Republic*, September, 4, 1896.

²⁰³ For some examples of illustrations see, “The Bicycle a Boon,” *Idaho Statesman*, October 4, 1896; “Kemble Illustrates the Piccaninny Club Awheel,” *San Francisco Examiner*, August 8, 1897.

riders.²⁰⁴ In some ways participant and in other ways pariah in the broader phenomenon of cycling, black riders used bicycles like the rest of the urban population, but there were some ways in which black riders used bicycles to demonstrate and celebrate in their own way.

On Emancipation Day, which marked the anniversary of Lincoln's famous proclamation, legions of "colored wheelmen" assembled near the nation's capital and others in Springfield, Illinois to celebrate by parading atop their bicycles.²⁰⁵ Here, riders marched in jubilee on top of a machine whose devotees had been mostly white and, until relatively recently, mostly wealthy. That they chose to remember the emancipation of slavery atop vehicles so often cited as emancipating was probably no accident. For onlookers, nothing was more American than bicycles, and perhaps it served as an appropriate way to commemorate an important American milestone; yet the parades likely meant more for the participants than the observers, who through their festival were creating a narrative, borrowing a phrase from Clifford Geertz, a "story they tell themselves about themselves."²⁰⁶ Addressing social or racial issues through a parade was nothing new and neither was the story they were narrating.²⁰⁷ For those riders, long used to prejudice and railing against it, the cycling city represented yet another moment in history where reality clouded but could not deter the promises of hope. In all, the bicycle represented more than just a way to move about, for certain urban inhabitants it seemed to hold the potential, whether realizable or not, as a social leveler. As one prominent writer rosily predicted: "...the bicycle promise[s] to fulfill for us the Declaration of Independence; women become the equals of

²⁰⁴ Commonly, races, parades, and festivals for cyclists were organized along racial lines. See, for example, the series of races, and post-meet festival in St. Louis, organized by the Afro-American Cycle Racing Association, "Afro-American Cyclists," *St. Louis Republic*, August 30, 1898. For more on the issue of bicycle racing and segregation see Major Taylor, *The Fastest Bicycle Rider in the World* (Worcester, Mass.: Wormley Pub. Co., 1928).

²⁰⁵ "Emancipation Day at Springfield, Ill." *The Washington Post*, September 23, 1896; "The Negro's Day of Jubilee" *The Washington Post*, September 15, 1896.

²⁰⁶ It should be noted that this quote derives from observation Geertz made about Balinese cockfighting, nothing remotely close, temporally, geographically, or thematically to bicycle parades in the 1890s. Nonetheless, the logic applies. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures, Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 448.

²⁰⁷ Davis, *Parades and Power*, 155.

men, and the black and the Chinaman speed with them across the pleasant levels of Democracy.”²⁰⁸

Conclusion

The American cycling city, lost in the time of the 1890s, incorporated not only physical changes on a grand scale, but also cultural and social transformations of similar proportion. Complicating traditions and norms, etiquette and manners, written rules and unspoken truths, cyclists paced the evolution from the Gilded Age city to the modern one. The nineteenth-century city, much like the corsets that so many female cyclists abandoned, was tightly wrapped, constricted, and, for some, suffocating. Yet, the cycling city that straddled the nineteenth and twentieth centuries brought with it a series of changes and promises. Mobility increased. Leisure, once marked by a culture dominated by homosociality, became increasingly heterosocial. Certain public, city spaces, like municipal parks, which although would remain shaped and controlled by dominant classes, grew ever more diverse in terms of class. Leisure, recreation, and exercise were democratized.

Praising these changes, one journalist, appropriately on Independence Day, 1896, joined his colleagues across the nation in celebrating the emancipatory powers of the bicycle. Thanks to the bicycle, the columnist affirmed that cyclists, and particularly women, “entered into a new kingdom.”²⁰⁹ Correctly, the author admitted that revolution would likely have happened without the bicycle. Indeed, many of the social transformations unleashed inside American cities were

²⁰⁸ Owen Wister, “Artists and the Wheel,” *The Critic*, December, 1895 as quoted in Wade N. Praeger, “Fin de cycle Seattle, the American Bicycle craze of the 1890s” (Master’s thesis, Western Washington University, 1997).

²⁰⁹ “Woman Awheel,” *Cleveland Critic*, July 4, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

long in the making. Nonetheless, the bicycle accelerated the pace of change and, in its own distinct ways, shaped late-nineteenth-century urban America. The bicycle and its profound effects on urban life were here to stay...or so everyone thought.

Chapter 5

The Crash

“It seems likely enough just now that some of us who happen to be alive and observant in this year of grace, may come to be regarded with interest by persons still unborn as ancients, who can remember when there were no bicycles, when pavements in cities were still rough, when there were no cinder paths along the country roads, when women almost universally wore long skirts and horses were still almost as common a sight in the streets as human creatures.”¹ When the writer for *Scribner’s* magazine penned these words hailing 1896 as a year defined by the bicycle, the author, like so many of his peers, could never have imagined what was about to happen. Just several years earlier and out of nowhere, bicycles populated American cities. What had been just a few hundred riders slowly grew to a group of a few thousand, before exploding into an army of millions. Before the 1890s, bicycles were a plaything, a toy, and a rare sight. By mid-decade, they invaded American cities at a staggering pace. Then, just a few years later, again out of nowhere, bicycles disappeared. The cycling city was no more...at least not in the United States.

How did such a popular device for transportation, recreation, leisure, and exercise vanish? American cities in the 1890s stood as monuments to the bicycles and cyclists’ powerful urban force. The ways in which urban Americans lived in, and perceived, the city changed dramatically. Bicycles, as part of a broader transportation revolution, altered contemporary notions of space and time. For those who flocked to the city for its promises of spectacle, excitement, and constant redevelopment, bicycles served as a tangible reminder of the possibilities unleashed in the age of modernity. City streets were not only filled with bicycles, but owed much of their shape to the very wheels that spun across them. The cycling paths that

¹ “The Point of View,” *Scribner’s Magazine*, June 1896, 783-784.

lined most major cities had been a radical development in the pre-nascent field of urban planning. Those paths, along with changes in urban traffic patterns and regulations, outlasted many of the cyclists who shepherded their arrival. By the early twentieth century, the once-ubiquitous bicycle that had dominated the streets and newspaper headlines faded away.

The few authors who have examined the sudden decline in cycling offer various theories. The development of the automobile, to be sure, is chief among them. But as any perceptive historian will discover, the dramatic decline in both bicycle consumption and the cyclists' collective political power predates the mass adoption of the automobile. Other writers, unconvincingly, attribute the fall, primarily, to the massive commercialization of bicycles, which reduced prices, but also reduced quality. Several historians have even hypothesized that “in the Spanish-American War, perhaps those seeking an emotional release from contemporary pressures came upon a more exciting outlet than cycling.”² The real reasons for the bicycle's failure are far more complex and multi-dimensional; but ultimately, the inability of American wheelmen (unlike their counterparts in Europe and unlike the automobile advocates who succeeded them) to secure the enduring support of the state proved catastrophic.

As the twentieth century approached, signs that the popularity of cycling was diminishing were hard to miss. Newspaper columns, once filled with regular accounts of rising bicycle sales, bicycle races, advances in bicycle technology, bicycle club news, and bicycle advertisements, began to feature just the occasional story (figure 5.1). The once thundering herd of commuters

² Richard Harmond, “Progress and Flight: An Interpretation of the American Cycle Craze of the 1890's,” *Journal of Social History* 5 (Winter, 1971-1972): 251; Norman L. Dunham, “The Bicycle Era in American History” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1956), 484; David V. Herlihy, *Bicycle: The History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 297; *Fifty Years of Schwinn-Built Bicycles: The Story of the Bicycle and its Contributions to Our Way of Life* Arnold (Chicago: Schwinn & Co., 1945), 29. Although there were some contemporary reports in bicycle trade magazines about the effects of the short-lived Spanish-American War on bicycle sales, any claims about the relationship between the “splendid little war” and the dramatic slowdown in bicycle use are unsubstantiated.

shrank to a pitter-patter of a select few. Yet, even as ridership began to ebb, few could have foreseen the impending cataclysmic crash of the cycling city. In 1898 the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, for one, acknowledged that even if fewer cyclists pedaled about the city, the bicycle “will always have its following of devotees made up of members of both sexes, some of whom thoroughly enjoy the exhilaration of riding, while others need the exercise and find themselves the better for it, and still others find the wheel a time-saver or a most satisfactory convenience for carrying them afield on explorations that yield mental delight and physical well-being.”³ Amid speculation that the cycling phenomenon was but a fad, a writer in *Forum* magazine in 1896 rejected the notion that society would ever spurn such a useful tool:

[A cyclist] has then become master of his new power,--the most valuable he has acquired since he learned to walk,--and it is henceforth a part of his equipment for his struggle with life.

Is it probable that having once become the possessor of a power like this the human race is going to abandon it? As well might we expect it to abandon railways, and gas, and electricity! It is because the bicycle has added so greatly to human powers that it is the most revolutionary social and economic force of recent times. It has entered into and changed the course of human affairs to a wider extent than any other influence. It is customary to treat it primarily as a means of pleasure and exercise, but in every community it is becoming more and more an article of daily use and necessity.⁴

Like so many soothsayers in history, these authors were dead wrong. American cities were no longer cycling cities.

Evidence of the dwindling number of cyclists proliferated. In Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, traffic counters determined that by the end of 1898 the number of commuters who had once rode on two wheels started, albeit modestly, to decline.⁵ In Minneapolis and St. Paul, the amount of cyclists fell steadily after the turn of the century though some riders continued to commute via

³ “Is the Use of the Bicycle Decreasing,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 1, 1898.

⁴ Josph B. Bishop, “Social and Economic Influence of the Bicycle,” *The Forum*, August, 1896, 681.

⁵ Interstate Commerce Commission, *Twelfth Annual Convention of Railroad Commissioners, May 1900* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1900); “Is the Use of the Bicycle Decreasing,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 1, 1898.

the bicycle.⁶ By 1904, the once well-trafficked bicycle paths of the Twin Cities, had, the City Engineer of Minneapolis reported, “grown up with weeds.”⁷ In the last years of the nineteenth century, the dozens of bicycle journals catering to industry insiders and bicycle enthusiasts suddenly ceased. Some adopted broader titles, others shifted their focus to the automobile, and still others disappeared entirely. *Good Roads Magazine*, a periodical that once combined the natural interests of the cyclists with the good roads movement, became almost entirely devoid of references to bicycles or cyclists.

Even more startlingly, the membership numbers for the L.A.W. declined precipitously around the turn of the century (figure 5.2). A once robust and politically powerful organization, boasting over a hundred thousand members, lost its base and political clout practically overnight.

Bicycle shops that had seemed to line every major city shuttered their doors.

Bicycle factories stood still.

In perhaps the clearest indication of the waning enthusiasm for cycling, bicycle sales slumped mightily. Peaking in 1899, the number of machines produced domestically declined at an even faster rate than they had climbed (figure 5.3). As demand fell, prices dropped, margins were squeezed, and the market became oversaturated. In a futile effort to fight off the plummeting sales, several of the remaining bicycle manufacturers, including most of the largest

⁶ For an excellent analysis on the number of cyclists in Minneapolis see, Ross D. Petty, “Post Boom Bicycling in Minneapolis: Counting Transportation Use,” in Gary W. Sanderson, ed., *Cycle History 20: Proceedings of the 20th International Cycling History Conference* (The John Pinkerton Memorial Publishing Fund, 2010), 73-80.

⁷ Petty, “Post Boom Bicycling in Minneapolis,” 77. It should be noted, however, that bicycle paths in Minneapolis, as in many other major cities, came relatively late within the bicycle era. Many of the paths built in and around major cities surfaced only in the final few years of the 1890s and some even in the first couple of years of the twentieth century, well after the bicycle’s peak in popularity. Relatively few of the paths, with the notable exception of the Coney Island Cycle Path, predated 1896.

producers, merged to form the American Bicycle Company (ABC) in 1899. By 1902 it went into receivership.⁸

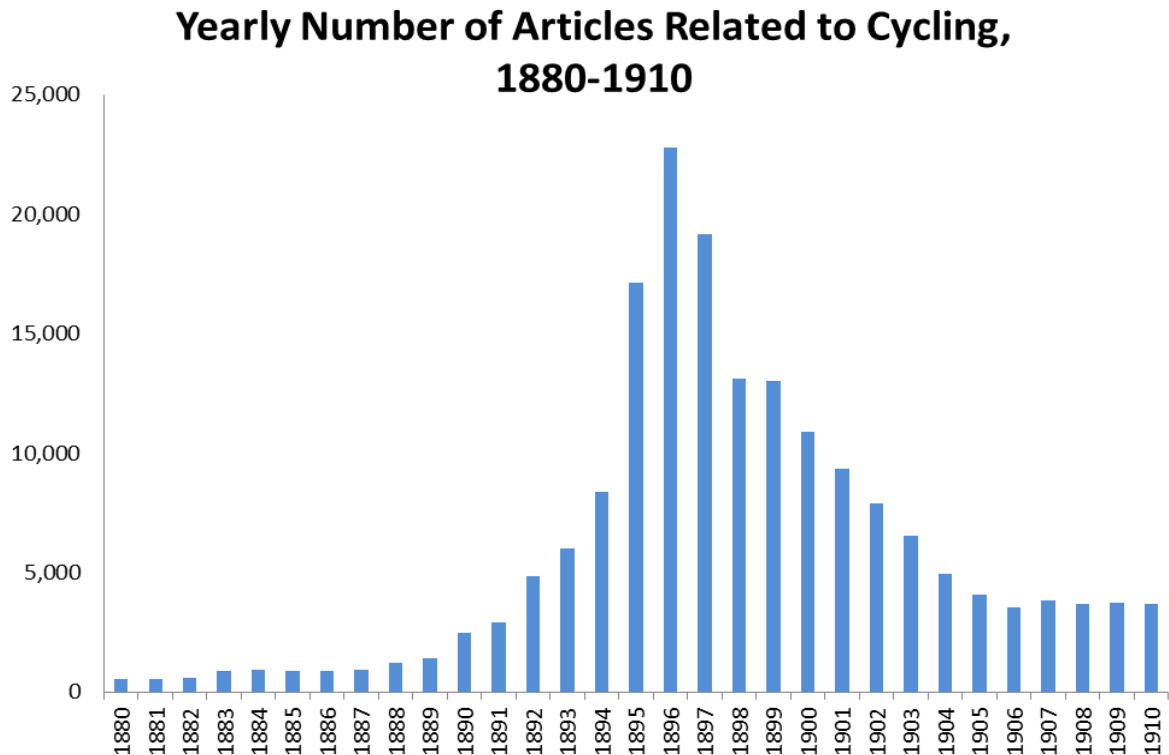


Figure 5.1: This chart represents the total number of articles and advertisements printed in a given year in either the *Atlanta Constitution*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *New York Tribune*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, or the *Washington Post* containing any of the following words: “bicycle,” “cycling,” “cyclist,” “wheelmen,” or “wheelman.”

⁸ Glen Norcliffe, “Popeism and Fordism: Examining the Roosts of Mass Production,” *Regional Studies* 31, no.3 (1997): 273-276; Bruce Epperson, “‘It Cannot be that they Have Made no Profit’: The Great Bicycle Trust, 1899-1903” in Andrew Ritchie, ed., *Cycle History 16: Proceedings of the 16th International Cycling History Conference* (San Francisco: Van Der Plas, 2006), 98; Thomas Cameron Burr, “Markets as Producers and Consumers: The French and U.S. National Bicycle Markets, 1875-1910” (PhD diss., University of California, Davis, 2005), 300; Bruce Epperson, “Failed Colossus: Strategic Error at the Pope Manufacturing Company, 1878-1900,” *Technology and Culture* 41, no.2 (April 2000): 300-320; “The Survival Fittest,” *The Cycle Age and Trade Review*, November 1, 1900, 1; Robert H. Merriam, “Bicycles and Tricycles” in U.S. Census Bureau, *Census of Manufacturers: 1905* (Washington, D.C., 1907), 287-297. For more on the slowing bicycle sales, the slumping bicycle industry, and the formation of the American Bicycle Trust see, Bruce D. Epperson, *Peddling Bicycles to America: The Rise of an Industry* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2010), 148-188.

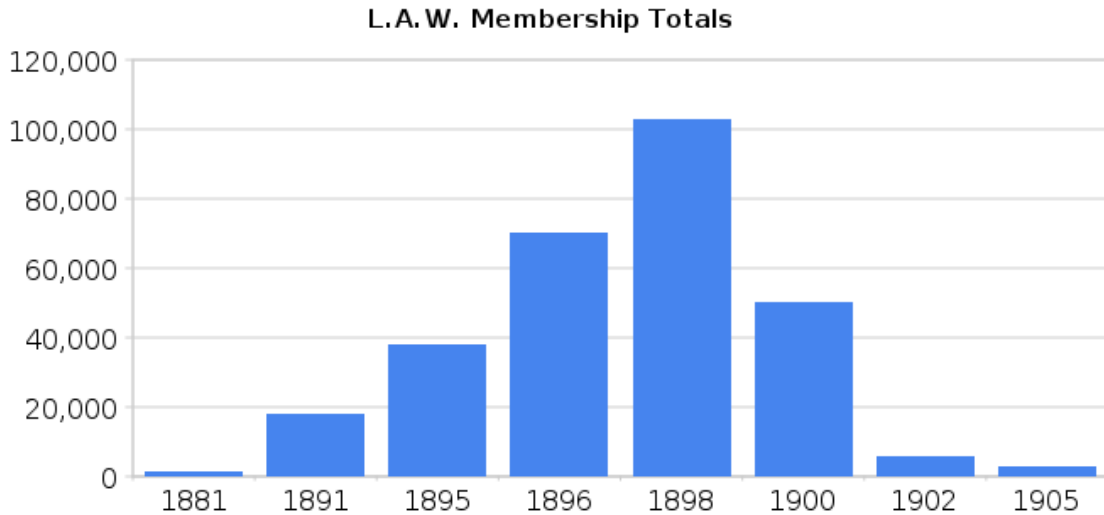


Figure 5.2: This graph represents, over a sampling of years, the total number of members in the League of American Wheelmen. Sources: Phillip P. Mason, “The League of American Wheelmen and the Good Roads Movement: 1880-1905,” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1957); Burr, “Markets as Producers and Consumers;” *L.A.W. Bulletin and Good Roads Magazine*, Jan 1, 1897.

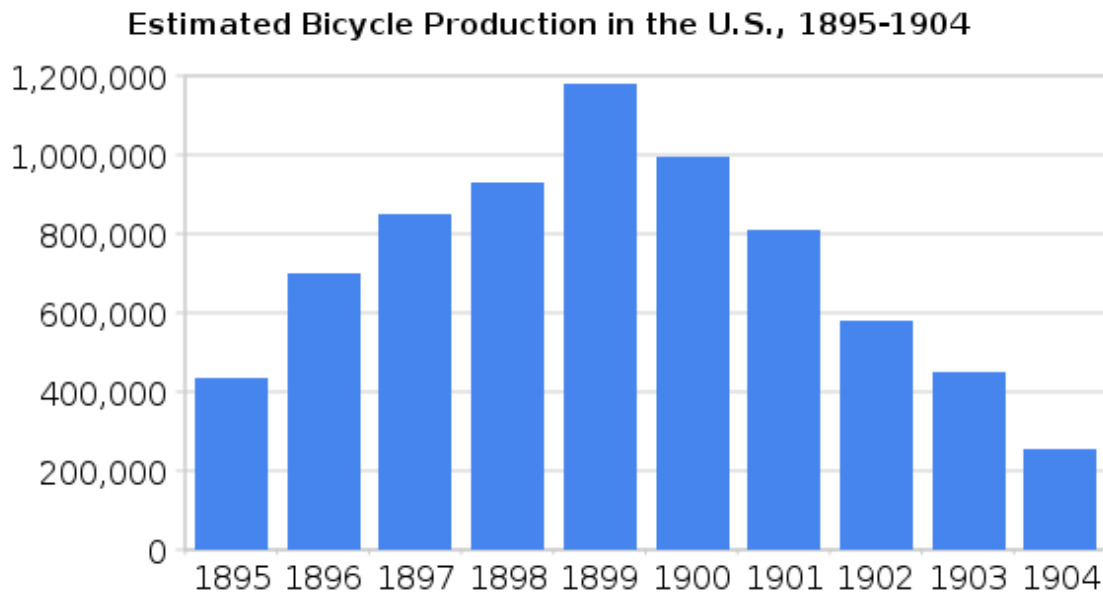


Figure 5.3: Even as domestic bicycle production plunged after 1899, the percentage of these bicycles exported out of the country rose, meaning a significant decline in domestic consumption of bicycles. For example, nearly 28 percent of the bicycles produced in 1904 were shipped overseas, whereas in 1897 only 10 percent of bicycles made in the United States were exported. Source: Bruce Epperson, “How Many Bikes,” in Andrew Ritchie and Rob van der Plas, eds., *Cycle History 11: Proceedings of the 11th International Cycling History Conference, Osaka, Japan, 23-25 August 2000* (San Francisco: Van der Plas; Poole: Chris Lloyd, 2001) with a minor revision provided to the author.

The exact timing of the collapse varied, of course, from city to city, but the trends unfolded nationally. In 1896, newspapers published more about cycling than they had or would. In 1898, membership in the L.A.W. swelled to its peak. And in 1899, domestic bicycle production soared for the final time before tumbling.

Anecdotal reports confirmed the quantitative data. In 1900, the *New York Times* reported that the once “interminable lines that formerly made the wheel parade a Sunday wonder” were no more.⁹ *The World To-Day* recalled in 1902 that it was but a few years ago when anyone “who did not ride a bicycle was looked upon as peculiar.”¹⁰ By then, the opposite held true. In 1912, *Outing* magazine, a journal devoted to recreation and nature and which itself had earlier been filled with cycling-related articles, conceded that even in the largest cities only a few wheelmen could be counted. A far cry, one of its authors noted, from the 1890s “when the exodus by every highway leading out of the city rivaled on a Sunday morning in number at least, that historic departure from Egypt” and when cyclists “counted the time lost which took [them] from the saddle to pay tribute to the ordinary necessities of life.”¹¹ The era of the cycling city was over.

Around the world, however, things evolved quite differently. In terms of the number of cyclists, the breadth of cycling amenities, and the cultural devotion to the machine, Americans and their cities had trumped all others. Ironically, though, the bicycle died a quicker and more absolute death in the United States than almost anywhere else. By the turn of the century, bicycle sales had plummeted and the once powerful voices clamoring for better roads, bicycle paths, and laws favorable to cyclists hushed. The advocates and cheerleaders that had espoused the health, time-

⁹ “The Decline of the Bicycle,” *New York Times*, September 13, 1900.

¹⁰ “Downfall of the Bicycle,” *The World To-Day*, October 1902, 1887-1888.

¹¹ J. Earl Clauson, “Rediscovering the Bicycle,” *Outing*, 1912, 673.

saving, cost-saving, and the mobility-inducing powers of the machine were nowhere to be found. American cities, quite simply, no longer set the example.

In the 1890s, cycling became widespread in urban centers around the world. The ways in which city governments, citizens, and the built environment adapted to cycling often followed the same path. In Germany in the early 1890s, bicycle schools began to dot the largest cities, as men continued, and women began, to catch bicycle fever. German riders, like their brethren across the Atlantic, fought against restrictions and complained about the inconsistency of regulations. Berlin walled off a portion of its city to cyclists; Munich required cyclists to attain a driver's license; Neustadt's riders sported bicycles with the mandatory license tags; most other municipalities required lamps and bells, while policy-makers and riders continually debated how to classify and regulate bicycle use.¹² In the 1890s in the Netherlands, scores of bicycle clubs, just like those in American cities, catered to elites and attracted newcomers looking to race, tour, socialize, or improve road conditions.¹³ Vienna reported a problem with scorchers, while Austrians in other cities weighed the merits of a bicycle tax.¹⁴ A United States Consul-General stationed in Japan reported that the bicycle was "being used extensively as a cheap method of locomotion in the seaports and large cities."¹⁵ Mexico City was abuzz with spinning wheels.¹⁶ North of the border, Torontonians reported that "the wheel today is king" and that the "enthusiasm for the wheel has pervaded all classes of the community."¹⁷ Dazzling bicycle shows

¹² Fanny B. Workman, "Bicycle Riding in Germany," *Outing*, November 1892, 110-111.

¹³ Theo Stevens, "The Elitist Character of Early Dutch Cycling," in Rob Van der Plas and Andrew Ritchie, eds., *Cycle History 12: Proceedings of the 12th International Cycling History Conference, San Remo, Italy, September 2001* (San Francisco: Van der Plas, 2002), 126-128.

¹⁴ "Far and Wide," *Bicycling World*, February 8, 1895, 495.

¹⁵ "General Notes," *The Anglo-Japanese Gazette*, September 1902, 46.

¹⁶ *L.A.W. Bulletin and Good Roads Magazine*, June 4, 1897, 671.

¹⁷ As quoted in Christopher Armstrong and H.V. Nelles, *The Revenge of the Methodist Bicycle Company: Sunday Streetcars and Municipal Reform in Toronto, 1888-1897* (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates Limited, 1977), 170.

drew thousands of visitors to Milan and Paris, just as they had in Chicago and Manhattan.¹⁸ Parliamentary debates in New Zealand in 1898 included not only matters of high politics and finance, but also serious discussions about a Cycle Traffic Bill, sparking talk of bicycle taxes, the “new woman” on wheels, and the power of the cyclists’ lobby.¹⁹ And cargo manifests from 1896 and 1897 revealed that American bicycles regularly floated their way to Denmark, Spain, Netherlands, Italy, France, Germany, Switzerland, England, Russia, Australia, New Zealand, the British West Indies, Cuba, Mexico, Chile, Peru, and even, albeit only a few cases of machines, to Africa.²⁰

London and Paris, in particular, experienced a flurry of bicycle-induced transformations. In London, scores of bicycle clubs and several cycling publications catered to the masses of new cyclists in the 1890s. Arthur Conan Doyle and H.G. Wells introduced bicycles into their fiction, while cycling royalty and the wealthy on wheels cemented cycling’s fashionableness. Like their sisters in the United States, London women found the machine invigorating and emancipating and the hullabaloo about proper cycling attire spiked on both sides of the Atlantic. The medical community and church leaders in England, as they had in the United States, expressed an early concern about the physical and moral hazards of cycling, but their warnings went largely unheeded by both audiences. As an historian of the British bicycle boom wrote, “There is no doubt that almost everyone who could afford a bicycle and who was not physically incapacitated rode avidly during the boom of 1895-97.”²¹

¹⁸ “Far and Wide,” *Bicycling World*, January 4, 1895, 243; “Far and Wide,” *Bicycling World*, January 18, 1895, 333.

¹⁹ New Zealand House of Representatives, *Parliamentary Debates: Third Session of the Thirteenth Parliament, July 7, 1898* (New Zealand: 1898), 289-303.

²⁰ *The Cycle Age and Trade Review*, November 25, 1897; *American Wheelman*, July 23, 1896, 43.

²¹ David Rubinstein, “Cycling in the 1890s,” *Victorian Studies* 21, no.1 (Autumn 1977): 47-51. For more on the history of the bicycle in England see John Woodforde, *The Story of the Bicycle* (New York: Universe Books, 1971).

Across the Channel, Parisians flocked to the wheel, riding for pleasure and utility. Touring the summer countryside, commuting to work, and parading down the grand boulevards cut by Baron Haussmann (figure 5.4), cyclists roamed in and around the capital city. The pace with which Parisians embraced the wheel was startling, even if it fell short of Americans' maniacal obsession with the wheel.²² But that did not stop American riders from keeping a close eye on the cycling scene in Paris. Magazines, both popular and cycling-specific, regularly chronicled the explosion that was the bicycle craze around the world and nowhere more so than trend-setting Paris.²³

As America led the way in creating cycling-related infrastructure, new traffic regulations and roads, manufacturing and marketing bicycles, other countries followed suit, even if not with the same fervor and intensity that Americans embraced bicycles. Reporting for the *American Wheelman*, a writer on assignment in Europe unequivocally declared in 1896 that cycling “is a permanent institution in New York, and the remark may be equally applied to it in London and Paris 1896.”²⁴ Quickly, that trajectory began to change.

²² For a detailed comparison of the French and United States bicycle markets see, Burr, “Markets as Producers and Consumers.”

²³ See, for example, Arsène Alexandre, “All Paris A-Wheel,” *Scribner's Magazine*, August 1895, 195-201; “Cycling in England in France,” *American Wheelman*, July 2, 1896, 33; “Paris Swells on Wheels,” *New York Times*, September 25, 1893; James B. Townsend, “The Social Side of Bicycling,” *Scribner's Magazine*, June 1895, 705-708.

²⁴ “Cycling in England in France,” *American Wheelman*, July 2, 1896, 33.



Figure 5.4: Above is a Paris boulevard in 1895. Source: *Scribner's Magazine*, August 1895, 197.

As the bicycle markets slumped and as cycling paths stood barren in the United States, other cities, particularly across the Atlantic, experienced no such slowdown. To be sure, in some cities, including London, in which the bicycle craze swept in with gale force winds, the enthusiasm for cycling abated. Fewer advertisements ran. Fewer novels featured the bicycle as

a protagonist. There were fewer bicycle clubs and fewer bicycle shows. But the slowdown was not nearly as sharp and not nearly as long-lasting as that experienced in the United States.

In other cities, bicycle sales and ridership experienced no such slack at all. In Denmark in 1907, at which point Americans had long abandoned the activity, reports from the United States Department of Commerce indicated that cycling in the Scandinavian country was only continuing to grow. In Copenhagen alone, some 50,000 of the 450,000 inhabitants rode bicycles. With cycling paths in the streets and an urban planning environment in which “everything is done to encourage the use of cycles,” ridership grew at the same time that American interest diminished.²⁵ In the Netherlands, whose cities would eventually become the model for incorporating urban cycling, cyclists pedaled through the city. By the 1930s, every other Dutchman owned a set of wheels.²⁶ French cities also witnessed no such slowdown. Across the entire country, the number of cyclists continued to grow at a rapid rate. In the ten year span beginning in 1900, the number of registered bicycles climbed nearly threefold.²⁷ The pace of growth ultimately moderated, but in general the number of French cyclists expanded until the 1950s.²⁸ Americans’ neighbors to the north, who had also enjoyed a frenzied bicycle craze, continued to cycle long after Americans stopped. In Winnipeg, for example, the number of licensed bicycles nearly doubled between 1908 and 1913.²⁹ In China, despite the generally poor road conditions, the number of riders adopting the bicycle crept higher, albeit slowly, in the

²⁵ Department of Commerce and Labor Bureau of Manufactures, *Monthly Consular and Trade Reports. September, 1907* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1907), 56.

²⁶ Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management, *The Dutch Bicycle Master Plan: Description and Evaluation in an Historical Context* (March 1999), 14-16; Serena Beeley, *A History of Bicycles* (Secaucus, N.J.: Wellfleet Books, 1992), 100.

²⁷ Christopher Thompson, *The Tour de France: A Cultural History* (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 2006), 15; See also, Burr, “Markets as Producers and Consumers,” 219.

²⁸ Burr, “Markets as Producers and Consumers,” 219.

²⁹ John C. Lehr and John H. Selwood, “The Two-Wheeled Workhorse: The Bicycle as Personal and Commercial Transport in Winnipeg,” *Urban History Review* 28.1 (October 1999): 8. For more on cycling in Canada see Glen Norcliffe, *The Ride to Modernity: The Bicycle in Canada, 1869-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

earliest years of the twentieth century and began a slow march that would, by mid-century, quicken to a feverish pace.³⁰ Indeed, in many foreign cities the paths toward the cycling city were just beginning to be laid.

Even as the bicycle lost its place in the United States, cycling continued to play an important role in foreign sites, transforming cities and the lives of those who cycled. As would be the case for the entire next century, European cities would become the places where cyclists rode to work, for play, and utility and the sites which would, to varying degrees, accommodate bicycles as an integral component of the transportation network. American cities—their planners and would-be cyclists—veered from the trajectory set in the 1890s. If anything, at the time, it seemed that American cities would continue to be the most influenced by, and accommodative to, the bicycle.

So how did such a popular instrument suddenly fall out of favor in the United States? The bicycle was not just some silly toy that won a crazed following and then vanished. It was no roller skate or hula-hoop. Bicycles, as people around the world demonstrated, continued to serve as a viable tool even as technology evolved. Its benefits in terms of health and exercise,³¹ flexibility and mobility, affordability, and its effect on the urban environment did not suddenly expire at the turn of the century, nor did its usefulness evaporate, even in the wake of automobiles, subways, public buses, and other forms of urban transportation.

Even at the time, many could not quite figure it out. As a writer for the *Cycle Age and Trade Review* asked in 1901:

³⁰ “Bicycles in China,” *The World To-Day*, June 1903, 725. There were even a few cyclists, including a handful of women, reported riding around Seoul, Korea. “Bicycle Experiences in Korea,” in *The Korean Repository* (Seoul: The Trilingual Press, 1896), 320-322.

³¹ There were some anecdotal reports indicating that certain riders no longer valued the health-inducing benefits of exercise as much as they had. For on example, Isaac Potter, a former president of the L.A.W., speaking at Carnegie Hall in 1907, remarked, “I don’t ride a bicycle any longer myself, because I pay less regard to my health than I used to.” Isaac B. Potter, “The Wheel and Wheels as Factors,” *Good Roads Magazine*, April 1907, 112.

Do the men and women who rode cycles in the years gone by ever stop to think of the enjoyment they got out of them? Are the city parks and the county ride less inviting than they were then? Are we less willing to take rational exercise—the best kind of exercise the ingenuity of man ever invented—than we were then? Do we never need to travel from place to place, without waiting for a train or a street car? Are we ashamed of the mechanic who contentedly rides to and from his work? Are we so fickle that the riders of other nations are to deride our lack of persistency? Are there times when a few miles on a bicycle would drive away the blues, cure our dyspepsia and make us feel new? Is the price of a bicycle, formerly four times as great as now, too great a drain on our pocket-books? Is it too much trouble to get into a cycle suit? Do we never feel the need of the companionship of the jolly fellows with whom we used to ride? Is there nothing in cycling to attract men to a ride in the open country, to take advantage of the blessing the cycle brought to us and which we have so thoughtlessly thrown aside? No satisfactory reply. Can anyone answer these questions satisfactorily? If not, why, in the name of goodness and common sense, do our bicycles lie rusting in the garret or the cellar?³²

Blaming industry insiders was a common response. Trade magazines often called out their own readers, the bicycle dealers, for no longer wearing bicycle clothes, organizing group rides, joining cycling clubs, advocating for good roads, and, most appallingly, for no longer riding a bicycle themselves. Ironically, as the defeated writer for the *Cycle Age and Trade Review* pointed out, the “lack of enthusiasm in cycling is due, to a great extent, to the negligence of the men to whom cycling is of greatest interest.”³³ Some dealers admitted as much: “I don’t blame people for not coming to my store and buying bicycles” one such retailer reported in 1901. “When I started in business I dressed in a cycling suit, rode my bicycle everywhere I went, and was one of the workers for my local club....Now I ride to my store in a street car, dressed like a respectable merchant, and rarely ride a bicycle.”³⁴ Few, though offered an explanation for their newfound ambivalence toward cycling. To be sure, some of the industry’s energy had been sapped by the looming popularity of automobiles.

The relationship between the bicycle and the automobile is oft misunderstood. But there can be no doubt that bicycle sales and the number of those cycling through the city dropped

³² “A Few Straight Questions,” *Cycle Age and Trade Review*, February 21, 1901, 415.

³³ “A Few Straight Questions,” *Cycle Age and Trade Review*, February 21, 1901, 415.

³⁴ “To Promote New Century Prosperity,” *Cycle Age and Trade Review*, January 3, 1901, 229.

precipitously as the twentieth century approached, occurring long before automobiles earned a significant following.³⁵ Automobiles succeeded only after bicycles failed. It was not the success of the automobile that destroyed the bicycle, but rather, in some ways, it was the bicycle that allowed the automobile to succeed; cycling advocates created the model that automobile advocates would later use with much more success.

Sales figures, registration statistics, and traffic data all reveal that there was at least a decade gap between when bicycles began to disappear and when automobiles emerged in significant numbers. In fact, the number of registered automobiles did not approach the several million bicycles in use by Americans during the 1890s until around 1920 (figures 5.5 and 5.6). Even by 1910, only a cumulative total of 458,377 automobiles had been registered. In the late 1890s, manufacturers churned out roughly one million bicycles each year.

The precipitous drop in bicycle sales was not met by an equally sharp rise in automobile sales. In 1904, several years deep into the bicycle slump, domestic production had dropped by nearly a million units from its peak. That meant manufacturers produced a million fewer bicycles each year, a number that could not come close to being replaced by the measly 54,590 automobiles registered at the time. Automobile sales did not replace bicycle sales. The bicycle was already left for dead.

³⁵ See, Karl Hodges, "Did the Emergence of the Automobile End the Bicycle Boom," in Lallement Memorial Committee, *Proceedings of the 4th International Cycle History Conference, Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.A., October 13-15, 1993* (San Francisco: Bicycle Books, 1994), 39-42.

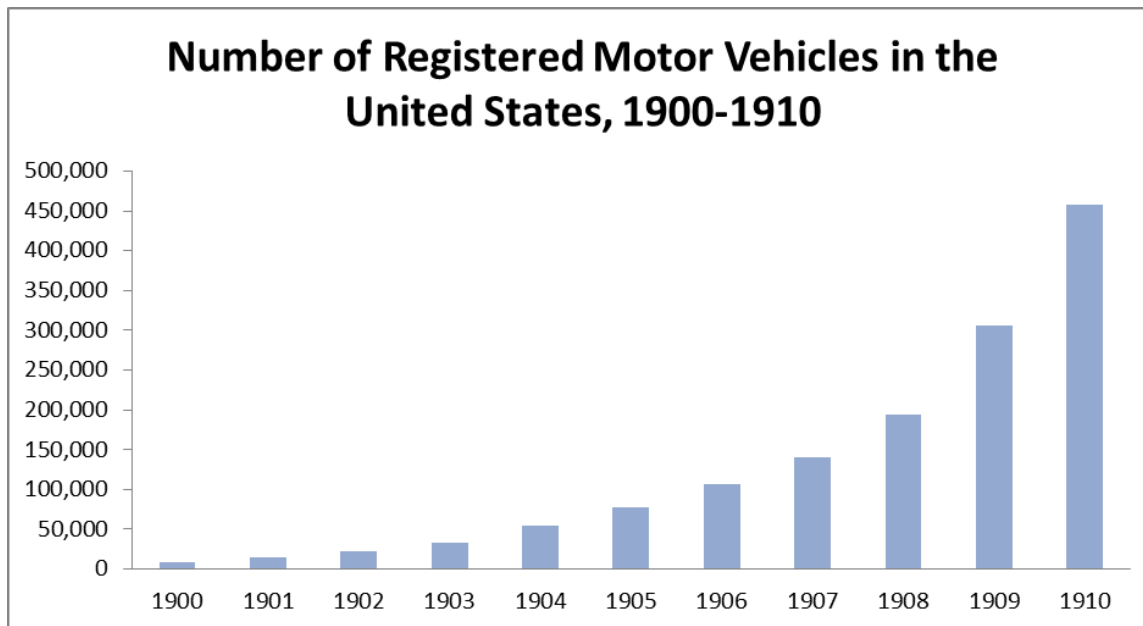


Figure 5.5: Admittedly, the number of registered motor vehicles does not account for the total number of automobiles in use, since some states did not yet mandate automobile registration. Nevertheless, these figures pale in comparison to the number of bicycles sold in in the 1890s. Source: *Highway Statistics: Summary to 1945*, Public Roads Administration, Federal Works Agency (Washington, D.C., United States Government Printing Office, 1947), 16-27.

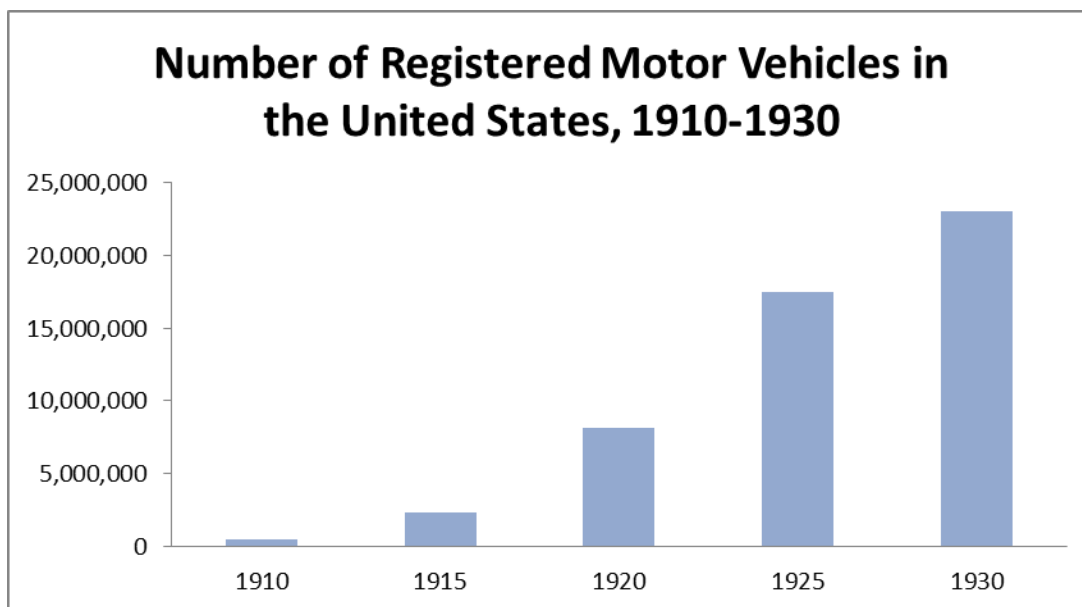
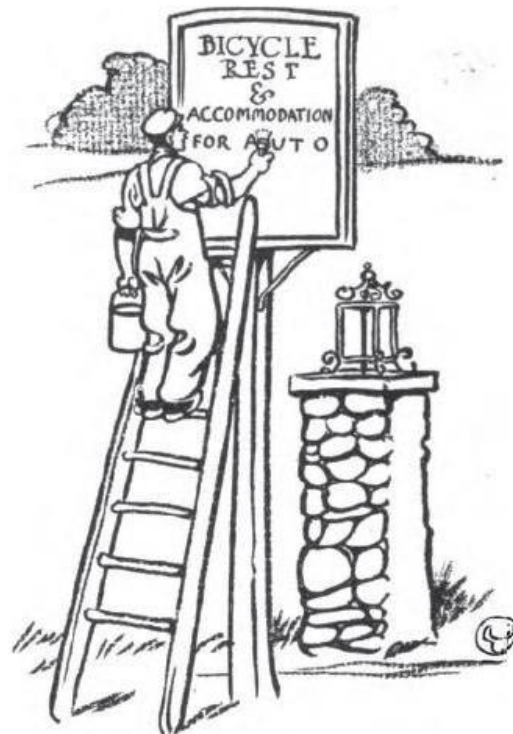


Figure 5.6: It was not until the 1920s that the number of automobiles began to outnumber the number of bicycles in the United States. Source: *Highway Statistics: Summary to 1945*, Public Roads Administration, Federal Works Agency (Washington, D.C., United States Government Printing Office, 1947), 16-27.

Traffic counts from American cities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century similarly reveal that even a decade after cycling began to fall out of favor, the number of automobiles on streets lagged far behind the bicycles.³⁶ Writing in 1905 for *Outing* magazine, H.P. Burchell provided the timeline: “The bicycle had its day as a popular means of travel and touring. An interregnum followed. The ale-houses again sank into desuetude and scores of them were not aroused into wakefulness until a year or two ago when the prolonged toot, toot of the automobile horn told them that good times were coming around once more.”³⁷ Indeed, the old Wheelmen’s Rest Stops, inns, and taverns, excitedly welcomed a new audience (figure 5.7).



An addition to his sign.

Figure 5.7: Bicycle and Automobile Rest, 1905. Source: *Outing*, August 1905, 538.

³⁶ See, for example, City of Minneapolis, *Annual Report of the City Engineer for the year ending Dec. 31, 1895* (Minneapolis: City of Minneapolis, 1896), 22-25; City of Minneapolis, *Annual Report of the City Engineer of the City of Minneapolis* (Minneapolis: City of Minneapolis, 1906), 16-17; Petty, “Post Boom Bicycling in Minneapolis”; Eric H. Monkkonen, *America Becomes Urban: The Development of U.S. Cities & Towns, 1780-1980* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 174-175.

³⁷ H.P. Burchell, “The Automobile as a Means of Country Travel,” *Outing*, August 1905, 537.

Yet, it is clear that the introduction of the automobile did have some negative impact on bicycle use. Some contemporaries even said as much. The automobile was clearly the culprit in the bicycle's demise, a Chicago wheelwoman recalled: "Naturally, what killed it utterly was the motor car. That just began then, but it certainly swamped the bicycle."³⁸ True enough, some of the most devoted fanatics of cycling transferred their enthusiasm for two wheels to four. Bicycle club memberships sagged as automobile clubs first started to appear in cities. Many of those forming and joining the automobile societies were the very same defectors who had abandoned their cycling clubs. Symbolic of the transformation, the Century Wheelmen of Philadelphia in 1902 even transformed their empty bicycle room into a parking garage for automobiles.³⁹ That same year, a group of motor clubs coalesced to form the American Automobile Association, an organization that would follow a similar model to, and in the footsteps of, the L.A.W. Many members of these automobile groups, having been cyclists, remembered and learned from the successes and ultimate failure of the bicycle.⁴⁰

The shift of interest from bicycles to automobiles was most visible among those most invested in the bicycle industry. Bicycle mechanics became automobile mechanics. Bicycle manufacturers became automobile manufacturers. Schwinn designed and built an automobile as early as 1896 and Colonel Pope, the once-heralded father of the American bicycle industry, began producing automobiles, as he excitedly reported that his 15,000-strong squad of bicycle

³⁸ "Bicycles and Billiards," N.D., Edith Ogden Harrison, Writing and Outgoing Correspondence, MS Harrison, Box 19 Folder 952, Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois.

³⁹ James J. Flink, *America Adopts the Automobile, 1895-1910* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1970), 217.

⁴⁰ Gijs Mom notes that some of the early hostility that automobile enthusiasts faced "reminded motorists of what had happened ten to twenty years before" in terms of the bicycle. They subsequently organized themselves and tried to overcome, to an even greater degree than cyclists had been able to, the challenges of integrating automobiles into American society and on onto its roads. Gijs Mom, *The Electric Vehicle: Technology and Expectations in the Automobile Age* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 47.

agents were “fairly howling” for automobiles in order to meet the expected demand.⁴¹ As the prices for bicycles marched steadily downward and as sales began to slow from peak levels, dealers and the manufacturers jumped at the idea of a new market. With an exceptionally consumerist culture, the United States, it seemed to capitalists, was primed to embrace the newest and most glamorous goods. Furthering this buzz of excitement was the beginnings of a media presence for the nascent automobile industry. Automobile trade magazines, such as *Horseless Age*, debuted in 1895, even though there were almost no automobile sales yet in the U.S.⁴² Even if Americans had not yet caught automobile fever, industry leaders in the bicycle trade had.

Bicycle enthusiasts, industry insiders or recreational riders, became automobile enthusiasts for the very same reasons that initially attracted them to cycling. Viewed by some as an expensive toy that frightened horses and threatened the serenity of urban parks⁴³ (just as the bicycle had), the automobile ultimately came to represent the exact things that had made the bicycle so appealing: freedom, mobility, sexiness, exclusiveness, independence, and health. Automobile clubs, like their cycling ancestors, took group rides, lobbied for better roads, showed off their machines, and, more than anything, enjoyed the camaraderie of being a devotee of the latest technological marvel. City dwellers relished the thought of being able to escape the city and tourists dreamed of the once far-away lands that now seemed within easy reach. Planners imagined cities swarming with cars. Marketers pitched the automobile as freeing, health-inducing, and life-improving. Exhibitors wowed their crowds with electrified displays of automobiles, selling fantasy via technological might. Sanitarians praised the machine for having

⁴¹ *Fifty Years of Schwinn-Built Bicycles*, 22; “Fairly Howling,” *Motor World*, October 11, 1900 as quoted in Flink, *America Adopts the Automobile*, 35.

⁴² Flink, *America Adopts the Automobile*, 7.

⁴³ Mark S. Foster, “The Automobile and the City,” in David Lanier Lewis and Laurence Goldstein, *The Automobile and American Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1983), 25.

the ability to replace horses and make the city cleaner. Doctors insisted that it could restore the nerves of, and bring the fresh rural air within easy reach of, urban dwellers. As two historians put it, “Fashionable magazines began running articles stressing the dangers of overexertion and fatigue in recreation, and social leaders embraced a new fad, one that also required special attire, inspired exclusive clubs and country outings, and launched the political careers of its defenders. This device was merely two bicycles, attached to a platform and powered by a motor: the automobile.”⁴⁴

In many ways, the automobile out-bicycled the bicycle. It was the bicycle that gave Americans their first private vehicle. It was bicycles that first allowed Americans to skirt the hassles and crowds of public transportation. It was atop bicycles that people commuted to work, promenaded down the boulevard, and fled the city for the tonics of the country. In this respect, knowing full-well how much Americans came to love the automobiles, it is not difficult to imagine why bicycles had been so popular. When the historian Clay McShane wrote that “more than any other consumer good the motor car provided fantasies of status, freedom, and escape from the constraints of a highly disciplined urban, industrial order,” he could easily have been describing the bicycle in the 1890s.⁴⁵ Yet, as a newer, more luxurious, faster, and of course motorized vehicle, the automobile appealed to an emerging majority. As one of the original pioneers in automotive technology, Hiram Percy Maxim, described, the bicycle had “created a

⁴⁴ Perry R. Duis and Glen E. Holt, “Chicago as it was: City on Wheels,” *Chicago*, June 1979, 192. See also, Henry R. Sutphen, “Touring in Automobiles,” *Outing*, May 1901, 197-202.

⁴⁵ Clay McShane, *Down the Asphalt Path: The Automobile and the American City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 148. The language that contemporary proponents of the automobile used was also eerily similar to the ways in which bicycle advocates promoted the bicycle as a health-inducing, class-leveling machine. For example, an early champion of the automobile might have written these same words, but a few years earlier, in regards to the bicycles: “The roads are open to everyone; the fields offer everyone in intoxication of clean air and wide horizons, the magic of changing scenes that dispel sadness and boredom, the genial and invigorating breezes that give the short-winded city-dwellers back their health. The wide world is for everyone.” As quoted in Mom, *The Electric Vehicle*, 37.

new demand which it was beyond the ability of the railroad to supply. Then it came about the bicycle could not satisfy the demand which it had created.”⁴⁶ The automobile was in waiting.

Visionaries, engineers, and city builders also gravitated toward the possibilities of the automobile. The kinds of grand plans that involved crisscrossing bicycle-only boulevards, elevated bicycle paths and bridges, massive bicycle parking garages, bicycle valets, interstate bicycle roads, and laws and roads catering to cyclists were no more. The dream-like sequences painted by literary and visual artists in which bicycles seemed to solve every problem known to mankind faded away. Instead, technologists, engineers, sanitarians, and the first cohort of professional city planners reimagined their cities revolving around automobiles. The notion of private, flexible transport was here to stay, but the medium had changed. Utopian cities had become car cities not cycling cities. Even the Colonel, Albert Pope himself, who had once dreamed of a world in which bicycles would dominate cities, predicted that the cities of the future would be transformed around the automobile.⁴⁷ Daniel Burnham’s 1909 Plan of Chicago included wide, attractive streets to circulate people and commerce and, of course, the automobile, which he came to idealize—a tradition that master planners and visionaries like Le Corbusier and Robert Moses would carry forward well into the twentieth century.⁴⁸ Though cars had not yet taken over the streets, they had already taken over the minds of some Americans.

Overall, the relationship between autos and bicycles is entirely different than the one that has been assumed. Automobiles did not replace bicycles. Yes, automobiles fascinated

⁴⁶ David A. Hounshell, *From the American system to mass production, 1800-1932: The development of Manufacturing Technology in the United States* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 214.

⁴⁷ Flink, *America Adopts the Automobile*, 35.

⁴⁸ Daniel H. Burnham and Edward H. Bennett, *Plan of Chicago* (Chicago: The Commercial Club, 1908); Paul Barrett, *The Automobile and Urban Transit: The Formation of Public Policy in Chicago, 1900-1930* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), 73-80; McShane, *Down the Asphalt Path*, 206-209. The plan itself actually makes but one reference to the bicycle, citing “The rapidly increasing use of the automobile promises to carry on the good work begun by the bicycle in the days of its popularity in promoting good roads and reviving the roadside inn as a place of rest and refreshment.” Burnham and Bennett, *Plan of Chicago*, 42.

Americans, but few bought (or could even afford to think about buying) automobiles until well after bicycle use declined. Traffic surveys and car registration data both confirm that automobiles did not become more popular than bicycles until over a decade after bicycle activity began to drop off. Yet, bicycle manufacturers and fanatics abandoned two wheels for the promise of four. In the process, they sapped the energy from the once potent cycling coalition. The bicycle had unleashed desires and utopian dreams that it could no longer satisfy—fantasies that sold the notions of complete mobility, independence, social cachet, health, and futuristic cities. The bicycle’s popularity, in some ways, was the manifestation of a longing for a new type of city, one in which, principally, people moved about individually. The inability to fulfill the fantasies it created fostered an absence. The idea of private transport would never be abandoned, but the bicycle was. Americans, more so than anyone else in the world, had embraced the bicycle. They had the grandest plans and the greatest hopes, but it would not be until many years later, when prices finally dropped, that the automobile seemed able to satisfy those very aspirations. Then, not so surprisingly, Americans, more so than anyone else in the world, embraced the automobile.

Practically, the bicycle did have its limitations. Although it did offer flexibility, mobility, affordability, and speed, its flaws began to garner greater attention toward the end of the century. In Philadelphia, a local newspaper surmised in 1898 that cycling was starting to lose its popularity among “men and women who have to stand on their feet a large part of the day and

who are too weary at the close of the day's work to enjoy riding a bicycle to their homes.”⁴⁹

Those reluctant to exercise were certainly among the most eager anticipators of the automobile. Weather, too, deterred some riders, who eschewed the slushy streets or cold winds, even if few forms of transportation offered serious shelter from the elements. With subways running only in dreams and on blueprints, with the earliest automobiles offering little shelter from the elements, and with streetcars exposed to the open air, there were no perfect options. Yet, data from traffic counts does reveal that the number of cyclists, despite a solid group of year-round riders, varied seasonally.⁵⁰ Weather was just part of what aggravated some riders. The decrease in urban cycling, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* opined, “may be attributed to the overheating caused by riding, to the lack of opportunity to change clothing, to the aversion to bicycle clothes arising from constant wear, to the uncertainties of the weather and to the difficulties of storing a wheel.”⁵¹ Even though indoor storage devices, cold-weather cycling suits, and scores of bicycle accessories sought to address nearly every conceivable drawback of cycling and, even though many adopted the bicycle because of the exercise that came with it, a growing group of riders found riding more of a hassle.

Some of the issues may have stemmed from the machine itself. In contrast to other cyclists across the globe, Americans preferred a particular model of bicycle: one that stressed lightness and grace above all else. To be sure, commuters, delivery boys, and other utilitarian users often emphasized the functional components of their wheels, but many Americans stressed form over function. “One of the most distinctive differences between the American and European nation” in terms of bicycle tastes was “the decided preferences given by the former to

⁴⁹ “Is the Use of the Bicycle Decreasing,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 1, 1898.

⁵⁰ See, for example, City of Minneapolis, *Annual Report of the City Engineer for the year ending Dec. 31, 1895*, 22-25; City of Minneapolis, *Annual Report of the City Engineer of the City of Minneapolis* (1906), 16-17.

⁵¹ “Is the Use of the Bicycle Decreasing,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 1, 1898

lightness and gracefulness in the construction of almost everything intended for common use,” a Pennsylvania journalist reported in 1896. The English, like other non-Americans, preferred heavier, sturdier machines.⁵² The Chinese, according to a 1903 article, valued “strength, durability, and cheapness, rather than lightness and comfort.”⁵³ The Japanese likewise selected their wheels for practical/business purposes, not leisure.⁵⁴ The Americans fancied wheels that might not have been ideal for transportation. In fact, American manufacturers continued to produce and market bicycles as the lightest on the market.⁵⁵ Those bicycles, ideally suited for leisure, became even less practical as the shrinking market became dominated by utilitarian riders.

There is also some evidence that a significant portion of cyclists who were once drawn to the social opportunities afforded by the machine no longer found it such an attractive option. By any measure, cycling had become fashionable in the mid-1890s. Fancy bicycle clubs emerged in city after city and the most elite class of urban society finally joined the already privileged group of men and women who had adopted the bicycle. Yet, with prices steadily declining and the second hand market expanding—the very factors that led to the expansion of cycling—and with more commuters and everyday riders, some found that bicycles no longer stood as a marker of social standing. In 1901, an author said as much: cycling “is no longer fashionable; and it has ceased to be fashionable simply because the possession of a wheel is now quite possible to

⁵² “Buying of Bicycles,” *News* (Westchester, Pennsylvania), July 17, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, May 26, 1896-February 11, 1897, and undated, New-York Historical Society, New York. See also, Frank Berto, “The Electric Streetcar and the End of the First American Bicycle Boom,” in Glen Norcliffe, ed., *Cycle History 17: Proceedings of the 17th International Cycling History Conference* (San Francisco: Van der Plas/Cycle Publishing, 2007), 96.

⁵³ “Bicycles in China,” *The World To-Day*, June 1903, 725.

⁵⁴ “General Notes,” *The Anglo-Japanese Gazette*, September 1902, 46.

⁵⁵ “How the Finest Bicycles are Made,” *Review of Reviews* (advertising supplement), April 1894, 19. See also, Paul Rubenson, “Missing Link: The Case for Bicycle Transportation in the United States in the Early 20th Century” in Andrew Ritchie, ed., *Cycle History 16: Proceedings of the 16th International Cycling History Conference* (San Francisco: Van Der Plas, 2006), 73-81.

everyone.” With prices dropping, “fashion has turned its back upon the bicycle and is smiling upon the automobile, which still remains an expensive luxury and one that is possible only to the few...The *cachet* of exclusiveness will have been removed and with it half the charm of ownership.”⁵⁶ For certain, the most fashionable cyclists no longer found the pursuit of cycling fashionable. In fact, they abandoned their wheels in greater proportion than any other group. Evidence abounds that those who continued to ride after the bicycle heyday did so for purposes of utility. Workers might have continued, albeit in fewer number, to cycle to the factory, but no one would seriously consider promenading on his/her bicycle.⁵⁷ Even if the trendsetters represented but a small portion of the overall class of riders, they represented a disproportionately important segment.

Others reported that the novelty had simply worn off. “The probability is that a considerable number of persons who rode because other people rode, or for one reason or another other than for the pleasure which many have found in bicycle riding, have outworn the novelty of the wheel and have taken to golf or some other form of outdoor exercise,” the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported in 1898.⁵⁸ Some even theorized that Americans were particularly vulnerable to overzealously embracing and then quickly abandoning a cultural phenomenon. As the *Baltimore American* described in 1903, “This is a characteristic of the American nervous anxiety to get all possible out of everything in the shortest possible time and to run a fad into the ground. Then the natural, the inevitable, reaction comes; the pendulum of popular caprice swings to the other end, and what was before so admirable is dropped completely and pays for its

⁵⁶ “The Return of the Horse,” *The Bookman*, July 1901, 426.

⁵⁷ “The Decline of the Bicycle,” *New York Times*, September 3, 1900; Burr, “Markets as Producers and Consumers,” 287-288, 324.

⁵⁸ “Is the Use of the Bicycle Decreasing,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 1, 1898

former supremacy by being consigned to practical oblivion.”⁵⁹ The author of a handbook for women’s sporting activities suggested in 1901 that women especially had “caught the bicycle fever and soon ran the fad into the ground, with the inevitable result. Rationally enjoyed,” the commentator continued “cycling is one of the most attractive and most healthful exercises ever available for women, but, like everything else, it quickly loses its charm when one has overdone the thing.”⁶⁰ Similarly, others cited Americans’ exceptional impulsiveness in explaining the epic rise and fall of urban cycling. “The bicycle craze, in short, was the greatest of all crazes. It flared, flickered, and went out...To explain the collapse of the bicycle riding mania is not difficult. It was a fatiguing, troublesome, dust-accumulating pastime. It swallowed up all other pleasures. When it lost its novelty it had to go.”⁶¹ Still others, like a Baltimore journalist in 1903, thought that cycling had simply become just too popular too fast. “The violence of the craze” he surmised, “brought about its undoing.”⁶²

Since Americans purchased bicycles at such a feverish pace, there was some truth to the fact that most Americans who wanted a bicycle had already purchased one. Cycling had become extremely popular in such a short period of time and collapsed at even quicker rate. For some riders, the sudden popularity attracted them to the activity, but for many commuters and leisure riders alike, the bicycle became their trusted companion. Cycling was, despite its brief existence, more than a fad.

Nevertheless, in the midst of the bicycle era, some lamented the fact that bicycles had become too popular. That cycling was all-consuming and that cyclists had taken over the city was a common complaint. Speeding through traffic and riding on sidewalks, the worst variety of

⁵⁹ “Passing of the Bicycle,” *Baltimore American*, March 29, 1903.

⁶⁰ J. Parmly Paret, *The Woman’s Book of Sports: A Practical Guide to Physical Development and Outdoor Recreation* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1901), 76.

⁶¹ “Downfall of the Bicycle,” *The World To-Day*, October 1902, 1888.

⁶² “Passing of the Bicycle,” *Baltimore American*, March 29, 1903.

riders became emblematic of the entire group. In an 1896 article, originally published in the *Buffalo Evening Enquirer*, a journalist explained that the scorchers who ignored traffic regulations were already beginning to threaten the bicycle's place in the city: "The chief and most vexatious enemy that the sport of cycling has to-day is the cyclist. There has of late years flooded the ranks of bicycle riders a large number of the rougher sort, who unschooled by the adversities and trials through which the originals had to pass, value lightly and abuse those present privileges they enjoy and for which they toiled not."⁶³ Indeed, some unruly cyclists pedaled through the city in a destructive manner. In 1897, at a conference on municipal improvements, one speaker declared that "the greatest enemy to the cyclist in moulding public opinion, is the scorcher, whose sins are visited on all wheelmen, and they are held responsible for his misdemeanors..."⁶⁴ Some prescient cyclists realized that these rougher sort of riders threatened the reputation of the whole group. In Philadelphia, for example, the Associated Cycling Clubs of that city in 1895 offered to pay for a new corps of officers charged with keeping these rogue cyclists in check.⁶⁵ Nonetheless, pedestrians and particularly carriage drivers, a long enemy of the wheelman, grew more vocal in their protests. Citing the increased danger that urban cycling added to the dynamic of traffic, a reporter from the nation's capital in 1896 noted that

A spirited warfare is growing, developing between the bicyclists of Washington on the one side and the pedestrians and riders and drivers of horses on the other. The bicyclists are demanding entire control of every road and pathway. They have asked the commissioners for the enforcement of a set of regulations that would practically place all others at the mercy of the rider of bicycle. Their appeal to the commissioners is the very pinnacle of insolence. The bicycle organizations want the right of way everywhere."⁶⁶

⁶³ "That's What's the Matter," *Times* (Oswego, New York), June 28, 1896 in Newspaper Clippings Related to Cycling and Cycling Clubs, New-York Historical Society, New York.

⁶⁴ *Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Convention of the American Society of Municipal Improvements* (Milwaukee: Swain & Tate Co., 1897), 320.

⁶⁵ *Eighth Annual Report of the Department of Public Safety* (City of Philadelphia: Philadelphia, 1896), 13.

⁶⁶ "Cycle News and Gossip," *Baltimore Herald*, July 28, 1896.

Likewise, the growing number of cyclists, the ways in which they seemed to be taking over the city, and their overarching demands appalled a growing number of city dwellers. Objectors complained that the riders wanted it both ways. On the streets they wanted their machines to be considered legitimate vehicles, on the sidewalks anything but. And as riders toted their wheels on the railroads, their vehicles miraculously became mere luggage. When it came to lobbying for pro-cycling rules and regulations, cyclists often asked for special privileges and, to the dismay of others, seemed to almost always succeed. In reference to the pending 1897 legislation defining the bicycle's place in New York, one angry citizen wrote:

I desire to enter a protest to the so-called rights of the bicyclist population, and while the Board of Aldermen are considering an ordinance for regulating their rights let them insert a clause prohibiting bicycles from being wheeled on the sidewalks at any time. In order to get the right to wheel in our parks, if I remember correctly, the bicycle was decided to be a vehicle—and now I understand that this bicyclist population want them to be declared hand baggage, so that the railroads will carry them free of charge; and what will they want next? It is indeed a great nuisance to have these wheelman, with their so-called vehicles, walking down Broadway, on the sidewalk, when this thoroughfare is crowded. Let us have a plain definition of a “byck” and then make it take its place. If a vehicle it has no rights on the sidewalks whatever.⁶⁷

The author could have added that the same group of cyclists perpetually lobbied against legislation that would have required their machines to be outfitted with brakes, to be restricted by speed limits, and to have their wheels licensed, registered, or taxed.

On the West Coast things were no different. The *Argonaut*, a local San Francisco paper, editorialized, “Bicycle riders must be taught that not the entire earth and the fullness thereof are theirs, but that there are a few other people on the planet.”⁶⁸ Perhaps, they had good reason to complain. In Oakland, following an ordinance which required cyclists to carry lights and warning bells, local riders joined in a parade distinguished by the cacophonous sounds of bells

⁶⁷ *Proceedings of the Board of Aldermen of the City of New York From October 6 to December 29, 1896* (New York: Martin B. Brown, 1897), 45.

⁶⁸ As quoted in Raymond H. Clarybooks, *The Making of Golden Gate Park: The Early Years: 1865-1906* (San Francisco: California Living, 1980), 75-76.

and horns intended to mock the new restriction.⁶⁹ Cyclists in Topeka, Kansas had the exact same reaction (figure 5.8).



Figure 5.8: The parade, pictured above, was organized in reaction to a municipal ordinance imposing a speed limit and mandatory provisions requiring riders to carry lights after sunset and alarms or bells. To protest against the new ordinance, riders rang cowbells and gongs, carried torches, and cruised along at a snail’s pace. Angry marchers on wheels made sure to stop in front of the residences of the Aldermen who passed the ordinance where “their lights shone with a blinding glare, their bells rung, and their horns tooted.” Following the parade, the enforcement of the law ceased. Source: “Topeka, Kas., Bicyclists Get Even with the City Council,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 7, 1896.

An 1899 news article declared:

By constantly demanding they (wheelmen) make not only themselves but their cause unpopular...At first it was against the law to ride it in the streets at all...then its use was restricted in the parks, at the request of the horsemen, who are now in a ridiculous minority as compared to the wheelmen...when these restraints were removed and the same right to the streets and roadways was given to the bicycles that is given to other vehicles, the wheelmen requested still farther privileges; they wanted special paths, and they wanted to ride on the sidewalks.⁷⁰

The same set of concerns surrounded the debate over separate bicycle paths.

The issue of laying bicycle paths was a tricky one. It gave urban cyclists exclusive roads to travel in and out of the city. But by championing bicycle paths, riders may have actually been unwitting contributors to the ultimate decline of urban cycling. Aside from physically separating bicycles from ordinary traffic, the paths also promoted a conceptual distinction. What had once

⁶⁹ Clarybooks, *The Making of Golden Gate Park*, 75-76.

⁷⁰ “Bicycles and Street Rights,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 20, 1899.

been considered a toy for childish adults, the bicycle enjoyed, for a brief period, the status of a legitimate vehicle, moving through the city, serving commercial functions, and providing a primary mode of transportation for city residents. In 1896, a reporter for *Scientific American* jubilantly, but mistakenly, proclaimed that the bicycle had “once and forever” moved “out of the arena of mere pastime, and [had] established its economic value as a reliable means of transportation.”⁷¹ But by offering riders a separate path, the city and its cyclists accepted the fact that perhaps bicycles did not belong on the streets and, at least implicitly, endorsed the idea that bicycles belonged on the isolated pleasure paths where casual riders could enjoy their toys. The road to legitimacy, organized cyclists had once argued, required that bicycles be classed and regulated like all other urban vehicles. The L.A.W., Colonel Pope, and countless organized and unattached cyclists had focused their efforts on lobbying lawmakers to define the bicycle as a vehicle, in the same manner as the carriage. They then opposed city ordinances requiring cyclists to carry lamps, bells, or register their vehicles, not on the grounds that the restrictions were too prohibitive, but rather because they were not equally applied to all types of vehicles. Emblematic of the hypocrisy evident in the push for bicycle paths, a band of forgetful cyclists, having themselves been barred from the grounds of Central Park, instigated a campaign to replace the horse bridle path with a path for their exclusive pleasure.⁷²

In the campaign for good roads, cyclists boasted about the universal benefits of smooth pavements. Since teamsters, farmers, merchants, consumers, urbanites, and country folk all, supposedly, stood to gain from improving road conditions, cyclists solicited these interest groups to join the good roads coalition. Indeed, in terms of improving roads, cycling advocates found many allies. But by shifting their focus to pathways exclusively for cycling, cyclists moved into

⁷¹ “A Slap at Alex Schwalbach,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 14, 1896; “The Bicycle in its Relation to Good Roads,” *Scientific American*, September 19, 1896.

⁷² “Cyclists’ Mass Meeting,” *New York Sun*, May 16, 1896.

their own political corner. With their demands echoing louder than ever, non-cyclists moaned “that the wheelmen want the earth.”⁷³ Even some pro-cycling organizations argued that the bicycle path movement cannibalized the good roads movement and was “essentially selfish in motive.”⁷⁴ When a division of the L.A.W. spoke out against bicycle paths, it lobbied instead for “good roads, which must prove a benefit alike to all classes of citizens.”⁷⁵ But they faced an uphill battle, considering that the majority of riders pushed the L.A.W. to focus on laying bicycle paths, which could be laid cheaply and for their exclusive use.⁷⁶ Fragmenting the delicate and, what would prove to be, ephemeral alliance of cyclists and those non-cyclists who supported good roads proved costly.

Conceptually too, the championship of bicycle-only roads undermined the legal doctrine at the very heart of the rationale that cyclists applied over and over again: bicycles are just like any other urban vehicle. Yet, on the pathways the men and women who cruised atop their light frames validated the theory that bicycles were somehow different from the assortment of vehicles that traversed the roads. As one avid cyclist predicted in an 1896 editorial, bicycle paths “will be the means of segregating the wheelmen into an exclusive, and I fear odious, class.”⁷⁷ Ultimately, once the bicycle mania waned, cycling would indeed regain its pastime status. Bicycle paths may have been one culprit.

Along the same lines, there is ample evidence that municipal governments did not go far enough to secure the permanent place of the bicycle. To be sure, American cities in the 1890s accommodated bicycles in some startling ways. Traffic laws were rewritten, large-scale repaving projects were launched, municipal parks were eventually unlocked to cyclists, and

⁷³ “Cyclists’ Mass Meeting,” *New York Sun*, May 16, 1896.

⁷⁴ “Pushing the Pedals,” *New York Evening Sun*, June 10, 1896.

⁷⁵ *Proceedings of the Board of Aldermen of the City of New York from October 6 to December 29, 1896*, 12.

⁷⁶ See, for example, C.T. Raymond, “Roads and Side-Paths,” *L.A.W. Bulletin and Good Roads*, January 1, 1897.

⁷⁷ “Lay of a New Jersey Wheelman,” *L.A.W. Bulletin and Good Roads*, August 14, 1896, 234.

bicycle paths escorted riders around, into, and out of the city. Although city governments legitimized the bicycle as vehicle in the 1890s, many of the reforms stemmed from an era in which local interest groups and private citizens could exert significant influence in municipal planning. As David Hammack found in his case study of New York during this era, “The city was neither ruled by a single power elite, nor by a genteel, patrician, or merely rich upper class. Nor was it ruled by an all-powerful political machine. Middle- and lower-income New Yorkers influenced decisions directly, through a variety of increasingly effective organization, including several political machines and a variety of special-interest groups, and indirectly, through their votes, petitions, demonstrations, strikes, and boycotts.”⁷⁸ Indeed, the League of American Wheelmen, in concert with local cycling clubs, emerged as a powerful political coalition and as one of the most vocal lobbying groups in American cities. Even though their voices have since gone unheard by most historians, in the 1890s, they represented a viable and potent political faction. Mayors, aldermen, and even the president of the country recognized the growing army of cyclists who effectively lobbied for better roads, friendlier traffic laws, and municipal ordinances. When local governments failed to go far enough, cyclists, perhaps to their own detriment, often took matters into their own hands.

The bicycle paths that sprouted across the nation, promising to bring the country closer to the city, to make the city more navigable, and to connect distant cities were more often paved by groups of cyclists or private capitalists than local government. America’s first significant bicycle path linking Coney Island and Prospect Park in Brooklyn was originally funded by donations from cyclists. Riders in Seattle, St. Paul, and Minneapolis raised money for, oversaw the construction of, and helped to police their own paths. In St. Louis, the daily paper, *The Star*,

⁷⁸ David Hammack, *Power and Society: Greater New York at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1982), 304.

sponsored its city's bicycle path in 1896 by collecting subscriptions from its cycling readers.⁷⁹ And the quixotic, unrealized plan for an elevated bicycle path connecting Pasadena with Los Angeles, just as the would-be bicycle highway between Baltimore and Washington, D.C., foundered in the hands of individual capitalists. That bicycle paths remained in the hands of private enterprise and, as one reporter noted in 1900, "received so little recognition by highway authorities," exemplified the lack of government support and public monies spent on bicycle-related infrastructure.⁸⁰ Local cyclists and their city governments brokered deals and forged compromises to lay paths, asphalt specific streets, and modify existing traffic laws. But the results were patchwork. In a certain city, or in a certain part of the city where wheelmen exerted the greatest influence, they could promise votes or simply pay for the improvements themselves. The consequence was often half-baked projects like the California Cycle-Way. With its true mission to produce dividends and not improve transportation or facilitate recreation, the California Cycle-Way, like so many other grand proposals, failed. When bicycle interest waned, capitalists lost interest, and the projects suffered mightily.

In the 1890s and early 1900s, municipal governments often saw transportation as an avenue for profit and their plans were as much about making money as improving transportation. Streetcars and trolleys, which paid for their rights to operate, expanded their reach at the invitation of municipal governments.⁸¹ Cycling offered municipalities few potential revenue

⁷⁹ "'Star' Cycle Path was Opened Gloriously," *Star* (St. Louis), November 15, 1896.

⁸⁰ A.B. Choate, "Bicycle Side-Path Trunk Lines," *Outing*, October 1900, 115-116.

⁸¹ It is important to note that the popularity of the streetcar continued as bicycle use declined. Some authors have argued that the success of the streetcars and their expansion rendered the bicycle impractical and thus led to its decline. However, the streetcars served as a viable mode of transportation throughout the entire rise and fall of the bicycle era. There is little evidence that the once-avid cyclists suddenly found that mass transit, even with the advent of the electric streetcar, had improved so remarkably. In fact, Americans adopted the bicycle, in part, because they fell in love with the idea of transportation. That desire for personal transport never ended. For an example of an argument that presumes that the electric streetcar replaced the bicycle see, Berto, "The Electric Streetcar and the End of the First American Bicycle Boom." For an excellent analysis of bicycle, automobile, and

streams. Cyclists had spearheaded the two movements to pave/build new roads and to lay bicycle paths. The former, benefitted the entire urban population, while the latter served cyclists only. Both had their benefits for the city; generally, though, neither yielded direct monies for the city.⁸²

When it came to cycling-specific transformations, cyclists might have pushed further to integrate cycling into the hands of municipal management rather than their own. Likewise, if cyclists had not (for the most part) successfully resisted municipal efforts to tax and register bicycles, perhaps there would have been a more permanent and continuing source of funds set aside for cycling-related infrastructure. And if cyclists had not successfully resisted efforts to regulate their machines (e.g. to require brakes), some of the resistance toward them might have subsided.⁸³

Across Europe, regulations unfolded unevenly, but on the whole cyclists across the Atlantic were more likely to be subjected to stricter regulations, but also a climate that promoted favorable public policy. French cyclists registered their wheels each year. German cyclists, in general, were subjected to strict restrictions. And in the Netherlands, cyclists faced a series of regulations, including requiring brakes and, beginning in 1899, the government levied a bicycle tax. The funds went directly into improving bicycle-related infrastructure.⁸⁴ Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, municipal governments in cities across the Netherlands

streetcar use in Minneapolis after the bicycle boom see, Ross D. Petty, "Post Boom Bicycling in Minneapolis," 73-80.

⁸² There were a few examples in which municipalities engaged in a public/private partnership to build and profit from bicycle paths. See, for example, Wade N. Praeger, "Fin de Cycle Seattle, the American Bicycle Craze of the 1890s" (Master's thesis, Western Washington University, 1997), 72-79.

⁸³ In the early years of the automobile, some advocates recognized, possibly because of the bicycle's failure to do so, the advantages of registering cars, licensing drivers, and paying taxes/fees. A 1905 article in *Horseless Age* described it as a "blessing in disguise" since licenses "restricted reckless drivers and lessened public opposition" while registration fees would be put to good use "for road construction and maintenance." Flink, *America Adopts the Automobile*, 173.

⁸⁴ Ministry of Transport, *The Dutch Bicycle Master Plan*, 14-16.

continued to grapple with how to promote cycling and, in 1935, Amsterdam officials designed a comprehensive plan for the city to ensure that the city would remain commutable for cyclists. The goal was to design a “bicycle city.”⁸⁵ The state, in the Netherlands and in other European centers, would continue to play an important role in fostering urban cycling throughout the twentieth century. Whether purposeful or not, European cyclists, much more so than Americans, managed to institutionalize cycling into the state.

In the United States, the American wheelmen’s strengths, ironically, might have worked against them. They won the right to cruise down the boulevards on brakeless bicycles, to skirt license and registration requirements, to largely avoid “wheel” taxes, and when the city failed to provide the cycling infrastructure and amenities they desired, they built them themselves. But the consequences were significant. Once the army of cyclists dwindled to a devoted few, as the L.A.W. and organized cyclists saw their membership rolls thin, and as some of the industry leaders shifted their interest toward automobiles, the chorus of lobbyists no longer stood strong.

Conclusion

As perfect as the storm that created the American cycling city was the tornado of events that wiped these cities off the map. The bicycle market, oversaturated with wheels, could no longer sustain itself. Sales and prices plummeted in tandem. Advertisements that once flooded newspapers and magazines thinned to a trickle. The smart set and their followers no longer found that their machines served as a social marker. The automobile, which did not replace the bicycle, at first divided, and ultimately captured, the attention of industry leaders and enthusiasts. The rank and file would follow in due course. Finally, even though cycling occupied a central

⁸⁵ Ministry of Transport, *The Dutch Bicycle Master Plan*, 23.

place in the American city, many of the transformations were wrought through a powerful political lobby that oversaw and sometimes even constructed the necessary bicycle infrastructure. As the lobby shrank, so did the chances that cycling would retain a significant presence.

The American cycling city, more so than anywhere else, disappeared frighteningly fast. Yes, some devoted riders continued to use their wheels for utility. Yes, some police corps continued to rely on their “silent steeds.” Yes, children could be found darting around corners and pedaling to school. But there was no doubt that the world in which both the school-age and the old-age worshipped their wheels, in which newspapers and debutantes gossiped about the wheel, in which mayors and lawmakers fought to appease cyclists was no more. Looking backward, a writer for the *Baltimore American* in an article entitled “The Passing of the Bicycle,” described the long-gone bicycle era of the 1890s:

Men and women, old and young, adults and children—all rode the wheel. The parks, the streets and roadways were filled with riders of the steel steed, and whenever one passed a couple or a group in deep conversation the one subject of talk was sure to be the wheel, its properties, its belongings, its excellencies and the proficiency in its management to which the talkers had attained.⁸⁶

In 1903, the age of America’s cycling cities already seemed like ancient history. In truth, that civilization collapsed nearly as rapidly as it was built. And although it involved far less drama than its rise, the story behind the fall of the cycling city was the thread that proved enduring.

⁸⁶ “Passing of the Bicycle,” *Baltimore American*, March 29, 1903.

Epilogue

In the span of a single year, the *New York Times* featured dozens of articles considering the bicycle's place in the city. Chronicling a range of subjects—bicycle lanes, female cycling attire, bicycle racing, bicycle traffic laws, unruly cyclists, bicycle clubs, books about cycling, and bicycle maps—the newspaper coverage in New York, as it was in cities around the country, revealed a deep interest in cycling.¹ The year: 2010. But it could just as easily have been 1897. Of course, times have changed dramatically. The article about female fashion on wheels was not one in which the author weighed the appropriateness of women wearing skirts, but was rather about “chic” women on wheels, dressed in heels, making fashion statements.² The piece on bicycle maps was not, as they had been in the 1890s, a proud announcement of a new Rand McNally or League of American Wheelmen-produced bicycle road book, featuring maps, favorite routes, and typical road conditions, but was rather a nod to Google Maps, which began to allow users to map cycling routes and receive specialized directions.³ Nevertheless, a full century later, the bicycle again threatens to become an important part of the American urban landscape.

The twentieth century was largely a lost century in terms of the American cycling city. Only a few years after bicycles and their riders invaded American cities in the 1890s they, and the transformations they had wrought, vanished. Admittedly, in the 1930s, as the Great Depression swept through the country, Americans looking for cheap transportation and those old

¹ “A Bicycle Lane Built for Few?” *New York Times*, December 9, 2010; “The Bittersweet History of Bike Clubs,” *New York Times*, January 19, 2010; “Unruly Streets: Cyclists and the City,” (Letter to the editor) *New York Times*, December 22, 2010; “A Cycling Snob Unmasked,” *New York Times*, March 29, 2010; “More Than 200,000 a Day Now Cycling, Data Suggests,” *New York Times*, April 26, 2010; “Bicycle Chic Gains Speed,” *New York Times*, September 29, 2010; “Google Maps Adds Directions for Cyclists,” *New York Times*, March 9, 2010; “City Council Hears Sides of Bike Lane Battle,” *New York Times*, December 9 2010; “Are New York's Bike Lanes Working?” *New York Times*, December 21, 2010.

² “Bicycle Chic Gains Speed,” *New York Times*, September 29, 2010.

³ “Google Maps Adds Directions for Cyclists,” *New York Times*, March 9, 2010.

enough to have fond memories of the original bicycle craze of the “gay nineties” briefly revived the comatose patient. Newspaper columnists wondered with excitement if the bicycle was back to stay. It was not. Four decades later, bicycle sales again spiked as Americans fell back in love with the wheel. From 1970 to 1973, bicycle sales more than doubled as baby-boomers took to ten-speeds in record numbers. Some cities launched invigorated campaigns to lay bicycle paths and build other cycling amenities. But within a few years, domestic sales again sagged. To be sure, there have been some attempts to promote cycling in cities and a handful of bold, and even some successful, experiments. Most famously, in the 1960s, planners in Davis, California began to design their city around the bicycle.⁴ The rest of the country’s cities though, by and large, made few such efforts.

Throughout much of the twentieth century, few Americans depended on their wheels. The vast majority who did ride did so for recreation, and the machine had become defined as a child’s toy more than a legitimate vehicle. Few commuted by bicycle and even fewer could imagine a world in which our cities were suddenly filled with hundreds of thousands of pedaling cyclists on their way to work, in parades and to protest, for social engagement, for their health and for fun, to flaunt their status, or to be part of the everyday street theater. That such a group could, and did, transform the city seems hard to imagine in a world in which the bicycle has lost its place.

Nevertheless, a full century after the demise of the American cycling city, a resurgent movement has begun. Across American cities, bike lanes are being striped, bicycle paths laid, and city planners are devising creative ways to incorporate bicycles into traffic. Protesters are again marching through the city on wheels. In the 1890s, they demanded better roads, fairer traffic regulations, and for the streetcars to be put in their place; today, they also ride to secure

⁴ Ted Buehler and Susan Handy, “Fifty Years of Bicycle Policy in Davis, CA.” http://www.des.ucdavis.edu/faculty/handy/Davis_bike_history.pdf (accessed January 10, 2011)

their place in the city, and with dramatics and confrontation they express their disgust for automobiles. Backlash, printed regularly in the press or online, reveals, as it did in the 1890s, a concern that unruly cyclists are beginning to take over the cities. Complaints about scorchers, as they pejoratively called them in the 1890s, who ride on sidewalks, the wrong way on city streets, and with little regard for others, echo across the media spectrum. And culturally, bicycles and cycling have been reinserted into the mainstream. Presidential candidates are seen atop their wheels, bicycle messenger bags hang over the shoulders of sport coats and tee shirts, and a professional cyclist, Lance Armstrong, has become a national celebrity.

Most importantly, city planners are finally taking the bicycle seriously again. As gas prices have risen, as global warming has entered into the mainstream consciousness, as obesity has become a national pandemic, as sustainability has entered the lexicon of planning, and as cities become ever more dense and congested, cycling has again become a favored prescription among a broad group of advocates. Twenty-first century planners are re-realizing that bicycles have the potential to pave healthier cities and breed healthier people. Looking across the Atlantic with envy, American city planners have visited the cycling meccas of Amsterdam and Copenhagen, studied the public-bike programs in Paris, and weighed the benefits of London and Stockholm's anti-automobile congestion pricing schemes. Stateside, they have taken action. In 2007, New York City planners crafted a broad and bold proposal for "A Greener, Greater New York" by the year 2030. Integral to this future, sustainable city is the role of the bicycle. The blueprints reveal the myriad of ways in which the city plans to promote and accommodate cycling. Paved greenways offering cyclists car-free lanes, water-views, and express travel, will circumscribe the entire island of Manhattan. Connecting to the greenways, a network of off-road bicycle paths, painted bicycle lanes, and on-road curbed bicycle lanes will serve the city's

growing number of cyclists. In all, the city envisions laying a whopping 1,800 miles of bicycle lanes. Going even further, the city has already begun, and plans to continue, planting rows of bicycle racks, providing free bicycle maps, and seeking legislation that would require commercial building owners to provide bicycle parking.⁵ New York is not alone. Chicago, which boasts more than 160 miles of its own bike lanes, has set a goal that at least 5% of all trips within a five mile range will be taken atop a bicycle and has plans to extend its bicycle network to some 500 miles.⁶ Portland, Oregon, which typically earns top marks from cycling advocacy groups for its efforts to promote cycling, has found that smart planning can rapidly increase bicycle traffic. As of 2009, almost 6 percent of all commutes were taken by wheel.⁷ Seattle and Boulder have had similar successes as has, to a lesser degree, nearly every major American city. The U.S. Census Bureau found that from 2000 to 2009 the number of cycling commuters, albeit still a tiny group, increased 62 percent in the nation's 70 largest cities.⁸ As the cities of the 1890s have proved and as the cities of today are rediscovering, if planners design cities that are friendly to cyclists—with favorable traffic laws, roads, bicycle lanes and paths, storage, and other services—then the bicycle can again become an important part of the transportation network.

Even with the rapid decline in urban cycling, one New Yorker's bold declaration in 1897 that "the bicycle is a permanent institution among the people of the earth" still rings true.⁹ Considering that more than a billion bicycles are in the world today and that bicycles are being produced at a rate twice that of automobiles, the bicycle has indeed become an established mode

⁵ The City of New York, *PlaNYC: A Greener, Greater New York*, 87-88, 151.

⁶ The City of New York, *PlaNYC: A Greener, Greater New York*, 87-88, 151; Jeff Mapes, *Pedaling Revolution: How Cyclists are Changing American Cities* (Corvallis, Oregon: Oregon State University Press, 2009), 191.

⁷ League of American Bicyclists. <http://public.sheet.zoho.com/public/bikeleague/2009bike-2> (accessed January 9, 2011).

⁸ League of American Bicyclists. <http://public.sheet.zoho.com/public/bikeleague/2009bike-2> (accessed January 9, 2011).

⁹ "The Future of Cycling," *New York Times*, February 7, 1897.

of life.¹⁰ Remarkably, bicycles, the first private vehicle available to the masses, remain the most popular vehicle in the world. Of course, many of these bicycles and the cyclists who are most likely to use their machines as primary vehicles live outside of the United States, but even in American cities the bicycle has retained a presence, albeit far less influential, in the urban sphere. Over the last one-hundred-twenty years, a select group of messengers, police, children, speedsters, and commuters have, to varying extents, continued to find pleasure and utility in the bicycle. Unlike most other inventions of its age, the bicycle has never completely disappeared. It is, to a remarkable degree, the very same machine serving many of the same purposes it had over a century ago.

With the exception of those living in the 1890s, Americans today, more than ever, are reacquiring an enthusiasm for “the wheel” and some are predicting that the bicycle will again take up permanent residence across American cities. Whether or not that is the case, the bicycle’s role in urban development and city life should not be underestimated. Like other urban residents, the bicycle has and will continue to shape, and be shaped by, the city.

¹⁰ J. Matthew Roney, “Bicycles Pedaling Into the Spotlight,” Earth Policy Institute. <http://www.earth-policy.org/index.php?/indicators/C48/> (accessed January 12, 2011).

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