

Before NASCAR: The Corporate and Civic Promotion of Automobile Racing in the American South, 1903–1927

By RANDAL L. HALL

IN RECENT DECADES, HISTORIANS STUDYING THE SOUTH HAVE ANALYZED sport and leisure activities to illuminate an array of broader topics. For example, they have mined accounts of ball games and horse races for insights into such vital aspects of society as segregation, gender relations, honor, and social class.¹ Although scholars have only begun to investigate automobile racing, an examination of this popular sport has the potential to reveal much about the region. Understanding racing's early years in the South requires first the correction of current widespread misconceptions, among scholars and the public alike, about its origins. This article chronicles the emergence of automobile racing in the South between 1903 and 1927 and establishes the new sport's importance as part of the larger processes of economic development, civic boosterism, cultural change, and regional interaction in the early years of the twentieth century.

Many observers, both academic and popular, have mistaken ideas

¹ Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740–1790* (Chapel Hill and London, 1982), 94–104; Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery* (Princeton, 1996), chap. 5; Russell J. Henderson, "The 1963 Mississippi State University Basketball Controversy and the Repeal of the Unwritten Law: 'Something more than the game will be lost,'" *Journal of Southern History*, 63 (November 1997), 827–54; Mary Lou LeCompte and William H. Beezley, "Any Sunday in April: The Rise of Sport in San Antonio and the Hispanic Borderlands," *Journal of Sport History*, 13 (Summer 1986), 128–46; Nancy L. Struna, "The Formalizing of Sport and the Formation of an Elite: The Chesapeake Gentry, 1650–1720s," *Journal of Sport History*, 13 (Winter 1986), 212–34; Pamela Grundy, "Bloomers and Beyond: North Carolina Women's Basketball Uniforms, 1901–1997," *Southern Cultures*, 3 (Fall 1997), 52–67; Andrew Doyle, "Turning the Tide: College Football and Southern Progressivism," *Southern Cultures*, 3 (Fall 1997), 28–51. The author thanks the staffs of the libraries at which he did research for this article, including facilities at Rice University, Wake Forest University, Louisiana State University, Northwestern Louisiana State University, the Fort Worth Public Library, and the Birmingham Public Library. Michele Gillespie, Howell Smith, Pete Daniel, Walter Becker, and the anonymous referees for the *Journal of Southern History* generously and helpfully critiqued drafts of this article.

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about the origins of automobile racing in the South that are rooted in larger stereotypes of the region. In late 1947 a group of race promoters gathered together in Daytona Beach, Florida, under the leadership of Bill France of Daytona Beach and Bill Tuthill of New Rochelle, New York. That meeting resulted in the incorporation of the National Association of Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) in early 1948.² It is commonly believed that in the period just before the group's official formation and in its early years, rowdy, lower-class southern whites, many with moonshining experience, were the leading racers. Southern culture has thrived on myths, with a myth of the stubbornly independent spirit of rural whites—integrity mixed with a hedonistic streak—being an important example. The modern sport of stock-car racing in the South benefits from this myth of its rural roots among so-called southern good old boys. It makes for dramatic publicity when a reporter writing in an arbiter of public opinion such as the *New York Times* can proclaim, “[NASCAR] has traveled far since days when the first racers came roaring down from the Blue Ridge Mountains in their bootlegging cars, itching to find out who was the fastest.”³ Now, as for several decades, this one business-oriented organization dominates the rapidly growing sport using a tight governing structure, while perpetuating the story of its freewheeling beginnings. NASCAR's prominence has foreshortened our understanding of stock-car racing's history.⁴

Pete Daniel has made one scholarly attempt to analyze the importance of stock-car racing in the South; however, he mixes simplifications of working-class culture with his narrative of the growth of the

² Jerry Bledsoe, *The World's Number One, Flat-Out, All-Time Great, Stock Car Racing Book* (Garden City, N.Y., 1975), 49–50.

³ *New York Times*, May 21, 2000, sec. 4, p. 6. See also *Los Angeles Times*, April 29, 1998, Sports, p. 8, for similar comments. In the flurry of expanded news coverage following racer Dale Earnhardt's much-publicized death on the track in February 2001, many writers reiterated the claim that stock-car racing originated with moonshiners. See Rick Bragg in the *New York Times*, February 21, 2001, p. A1; and Bill Plaschke in the *Los Angeles Times*, February 25, 2001, p. D1. Perhaps the most influential proponent of myths about rural southern whites was W. J. Cash in *The Mind of the South* (New York, 1941). See also Samuel C. Hyde Jr., “Introduction: Perspectives on the Common South,” in Hyde, ed., *Plain Folk of the South Revisited* (Baton Rouge and London, 1997), 1–17.

⁴ Racing has achieved such ubiquity in the South that one can earn an associate's degree in race-car performance at Forsyth Technical Community College in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. *Winston-Salem Journal*, April 18, 1999, pp. B1, B8. Catawba Valley Community College in Hickory, North Carolina, also offers a special program in motorsports technology. *Winston-Salem Journal*, July 12, 2001, p. B1. Further, several southern universities with engineering programs field race cars in competitions against each other. These races include teams from Duke University, the University of Virginia, the University of South Carolina, North Carolina State University, North Carolina A&T University, and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. This last institution also offers a concentration in motorsports as part of the undergraduate program in mechanical engineering. *New York Times*, December 29, 1998, pp. D1, D2.

sport in the 1950s to produce an interpretation with unresolved contradictions. Like many observers, he identifies early stock-car racing with competitions among drivers who ferried illegal moonshine out of the southern mountains toward piedmont cities. For Daniel, the drivers and the fans found car racing in the late 1940s and the 1950s to be a release for pent-up frustrations created as southerners made the transition from a rural, agricultural society to urban settings and regimented industrial jobs. He argues that the sport's Rabelaisian mix of violence and indulgence meant that "[i]n a decade when many frustrated middle-class Americans were searching for lost meanings, low-down southerners wallowed in authenticity." Though moonshining and violent release are very real parts of racing history, they are only part of the story. Moreover, Daniel's short description of the rise of the NASCAR sanctioning body that brought rigid control to the sport beginning in the late 1940s creates a paradox. If the principal appeal of the sport was its wildness and lack of control, one cannot explain the easy acceptance by fans and drivers alike of the guidance of a dictatorial promotional body organized for profit. While the reader learns of tales (some anecdotal and some perhaps exaggerated by promoters seeking publicity) of debauchery among fans and drivers, Daniel offers little understanding of how such a seemingly undisciplined group could have procured impressive race track facilities, carefully promoted events, and engineered powerful racing automobiles.⁵

⁵ Pete Daniel, *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s* (Chapel Hill and London, 2000), chap. 5 (quotation on p. 93). Interestingly, NASCAR and stock-car racing had not completely triumphed over other forms of racing in the South in the 1940s and 1950s. Daniel does not acknowledge that Indy-style champ cars ran a number of major events in the South in the period he discusses, including events in Atlanta on the Lakewood one-mile dirt oval on September 2, 1946, July 4, 1947, September 6, 1948, July 14, 1956, July 4, 1957, and July 4, 1958; in Raleigh, North Carolina, on a one-mile paved track on July 4, 1952; on the new "superspeedway" in Darlington, South Carolina, on December 10, 1950, July 4, 1951, July 5, 1954, and July 4, 1956; and on the new Daytona superspeedway on April 4, 1959. Champ-car race summaries can be found by year and track in the statistics section of www.motorsport.com (accessed April 8, 2002). For mention of various other events in the South sanctioned by the American Automobile Association (AAA) in 1950 and earlier, including at least one stock-car race in Atlanta, see *AAA Official Record Book, with a Special Section on Racing Rules and Speed Formulas* (Los Angeles, [1951?]), 35, 42–43, 52–67. A number of other writers have also discussed the history of NASCAR and its present growth. See, for example, Kim Chapin, *Fast as White Lightning: The Story of Stock Car Racing* (New York, 1981); and Robert G. Hagstrom, *The NASCAR Way: The Business That Drives the Sport* (New York and other cities, 1998). Neither Chapin nor Hagstrom departs from the belief that stock-car racing, as Hagstrom puts it, "was born in the South, the boisterous legacy of the daredevil moonshine drivers who tore up and down the back roads of Appalachia during the 1930s and 1940s" (p. 21). Hagstrom does offer good insights into the history and present state of NASCAR's business methods, showing a sport driven by "the throb of pure uninhibited capitalism that guarantees to pay only for performance" (p. 17). Dan Pierce draws parallels between Bill France's anti-union vigilance in NASCAR and the leadership style of southern mill owners. Pierce, "The Most Southern Sport on Earth: NASCAR and the Unions,"

NASCAR's identity has long revolved around the South, and other historians have also singled out stock-car racing as a unique regional pursuit. Though NASCAR vehicles have the body shape of stock cars (i.e., publicly available automobiles), they are modified in every other way into custom-built racing machines; nevertheless, the ability to identify with the shape and corporate logo of Fords, Chevrolets, and others remains important to fans. Likewise, the drivers, according to scholar David M. Johnson, were "folk heroes with whom the average [white] southern male can identify." The sport, "with its noise, dirt, powerful cars, and consumption of alcoholic beverages," became "a symbol of the southern way of living." As with Daniel's analysis, Johnson's depiction of stock-car racing anchors the activity's origins in deadly speed contests among southern moonshiners and federal revenue officers in the 1930s and 1940s. When not outrunning the law, moonshiners "participated in informal races between themselves and others interested in automobiles." Though admittedly "a small minority" (the implied majority is not discussed), these larger-than-life men "were among the most famous and proficient drivers and race organizers."⁶

In 1998 NASCAR celebrated its golden anniversary, marking its maturation as a quite profitable sport with a reorientation toward a national market. Simultaneously, the group and its enthusiasts paid homage to its alleged spontaneous rural southern roots. *Sports*

Southern Cultures, 7 (Summer 2001), 8–33. Most of these writers draw from Tom Wolfe's famous 1965 article in *Esquire* about driver Junior Johnson that helped standardize the romantic story of stock-car racing's origins. Most imitators, however, do not equal the elegance, playfulness, and irony of the original. In addition, Wolfe notes, even in the midst of glorifying Johnson's early life as a moonshine runner, "Of course, very few stock-car drivers have ever had anything to do with the whiskey business. A great many always lead quiet lives off the track." Tom Wolfe, "The Last American Hero Is Junior Johnson. Yes!" in *Esquire: The Best of Forty Years* (New York, 1973), 144–59 (quotation on p. 157). One brief academic article in the *Journal of Geography* in 1974 also acknowledged that "it seems questionable that moonshining has been a significant force in the development of stock car racing . . ." Richard Pillsbury, "Carolina Thunder: A Geography of Southern Stock Car Racing," reprinted in George O. Carney, ed., *Fast Food, Stock Cars, and Rock 'n' Roll: Place and Space in American Pop Culture* (Lanham, Md., 1995), 229–38 (quotation on p. 234). See also Pillsbury's 1989 article, "A Mythology at the Brink: Stock Car Racing in the American South," from *Sport Place: An International Journal of Sports Geography*, also reprinted in Carney, ed., *Fast Food, Stock Cars, and Rock 'n' Roll*, 239–48.

⁶ David M. Johnson, "Stock Car Racing," in Charles Reagan Wilson and William Ferris, eds., *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (Chapel Hill and London, 1989), 1241. For a popular book on NASCAR's history that emphasizes moonshiner connections and lower-class appeal in the organization's early years see Bledsoe, *World's Number One, Flat-Out, All-Time Great, Stock Car Racing Book*. See also Sylvia Wilkinson, "Red-Necks on Wheels: The Stock Car Culture," in Louis D. Rubin Jr., ed., *The American South: Portrait of a Culture* (Baton Rouge and London, 1980), 129–39; and Joe Menzer, *The Wildest Ride: A History of NASCAR (or How a Bunch of Good Ol' Boys Built a Billion-Dollar Industry out of Wrecking Cars)* (New York and other cities, 2001), chap. 2.

Illustrated magazine devoted a special issue to the history of NASCAR that affirmed the mythology already developed by academics and by stock-car fans: “‘Stock-car racing’—actually modified-car racing, and more precisely ‘liquor car’ racing—had begun with moonshine kingpins bragging about who owned the fastest cars and employed the best trippers.” Journalists gave the barest of acknowledgment to the racing events that preceded NASCAR. The writers for *Sports Illustrated* noted, “Stock car racing started to flourish in the 1930s in the Southeast, where the nearest major professional sports teams were in Washington, D.C., and where moonshine running provided a seemingly endless supply of skilled drivers.”⁷ This narrative of NASCAR’s colorful background means a lot to the sport. NASCAR could hope for nothing more during its current success than to be identified with the authenticity of the newly virtuous, rural South. As one corporate sponsor recently recounted the heroic journey for promotional literature, “Both Hardee’s and stock car racing grew from rural southern roots to become a strong national presence, and we make an excellent team.”⁸ Myth and profits go together. Cultural studies specialist Mark D. Howell has made an insightful attempt to explain the moonshiner mythology and analyze NASCAR’s dictatorial corporate strategies, but his more balanced arguments have not overcome the momentum of old stereotypes.⁹

Only occasionally do hints appear in recent literature that auto racing in the South has a history that extends much farther into the past than the 1930s, an extended timeline that belies the story of the sport’s origins in moonshiner competitions and the explanation of its popularity as a function of social changes after World War II. *Sports Illustrated*, for example, briefly quoted Bill France discussing his youth in the mid-1920s: “I used to sneak the family Model T out to the big, banked-board speedway at Laurel, Maryland, and try to run some fast laps. My dad never could figure out why his tires were wearing out

⁷ *Sports Illustrated Presents 50 Years of NASCAR, 1948–1998*, special issue of *Sports Illustrated* magazine (January 28, 1998), 47 (first quotation), 6 (second quotation).

⁸ Tray liner procured from Hardee’s restaurant in Birmingham, Alabama, April 5, 1999.

⁹ Mark D. Howell, *From Moonshine to Madison Avenue: A Cultural History of the NASCAR Winston Cup Series* (Bowling Green, Ohio, 1997), esp. chaps. 2, 3, and 6. Howell briefly discusses early race driver Barney Oldfield but mentions the early years of automobile racing in the South only in passing (pp. 83–86). Howell also offers thought-provoking speculations about the role of America’s mythology of the West in constructing the image of racers as so-called outlaws. Also see Peter Golenbock, *American Zoom: Stock Car Racing—from the Dirt Tracks to Daytona* (New York and other cities, 1993) for a popular history of NASCAR that balances well the true aspects of the moonshiner, good-old-boy image with the business aspects of the sport. Golenbock only begins his coverage with the 1930s, however. More recently, Golenbock acknowledges in passing that cars ran at Daytona early in the century. See Golenbock, *The Last Lap: The Life and Times of NASCAR’s Legendary Heroes* (New York, 1998), 2–3.

so quickly.” Elsewhere, France elaborated a bit more fully about his childhood interest in the sport: “I first became interested in motor racing back in the board track speedway days. . . . I was only at three of them—Altoona, Pennsylvania; Atlantic City, New Jersey; and Laurel, Maryland.” France moved to Daytona Beach, Florida, in 1934. There too he recognized that the sport of racing had already begun in the South: “I knew of a board speedway just north of Miami, but I never got to see it because a hurricane destroyed it before I got down there.” In 1936 France drove in a stock-car race along the beach in Daytona, and in 1938 he began promoting similar events there. NASCAR legend regards these contests as among the earliest stock-car races.¹⁰ Upon exploration, these tantalizing hints about the years just prior to NASCAR’s formation open the path toward an even longer history of racing.

The roar of race cars disturbed humid afternoons across the South long before France either discovered racing or helped to form NASCAR. From 1903 to the late 1920s automobile racing developed a significant presence in the South. The new technology of the automobile quickly became the center of a sport with a wide following in the years before World War I. As the car became less of a novelty and as the war monopolized attention and resources, interest waned somewhat; however, the early 1920s brought a resurgence of major events on the board tracks that first seized the attention of the young Bill France. Throughout these two and a half decades, from Florida to Maryland, Texas to Tennessee, drivers faced off against the clock in famous time trials and against each other on beaches, road courses, flat dirt tracks, paved and banked circular tracks, and finally, wooden arenas. They piloted stock cars straight from showroom floors, custom-built racers sponsored by automobile companies, steam-driven cars, and motorcycles. Racing tournaments often included events with two or more of these categories of machine. Hundreds of thousands of dollars poured into the new sport, and world records emerged from southern tracks.

The real origins of auto racing in the South complicate the myths of NASCAR’s founding, but the importance of these new findings goes far beyond undermining romanticized accounts of NASCAR’s early years. Even though several former moonshiners certainly drove in

¹⁰ *Sports Illustrated Presents 50 Years of NASCAR*, 70 (first quotation); Sylvia Wilkinson, *Dirt Tracks to Glory: The Early Days of Stock Car Racing as told by the Participants* (Chapel Hill, 1983), 21–26 (second quotation on p. 20; third quotation on p. 21).

stock-car contests in the 1930s and beyond, NASCAR and stock-car racing did not emerge exclusively from a rural tradition of fast cars, daring young hillbillies, and speed duels with revenue men across the red southern clay. The southerners among the NASCAR founders could look to decades-old precedents in their home region as they promoted major racing events and created impressive new tracks in the South in the 1940s and 1950s. NASCAR and its national following now perfectly illustrate the creativity, entrepreneurial energy, and nationwide cultural influence of the South today.¹¹ Analogous to the parallel growth of NASCAR and the South following World War II, the early years of automobile racing in the region likewise moved in lockstep with the southern culture and economy of the period just after the turn of the century. The southern elite cooperated profitably with northern industrial and financial titans in the exploitation of the southern labor force and the region's vast stockpiles of raw materials, while national economic and political control rested in the North. Similarly, wealthy northern sportsmen controlled organized automobile racing in both the North and the South through the American Automobile Association (AAA), headquartered in New York City, but southern civic promoters and well-to-do businessmen collaborated in introducing the sport to their region, in order to bring attention to their cities and to their own business potential.¹²

Just as it would have many meanings in the quite different era following World War II, racing served many functions for fans and promoters in a time of rapid change in the early-twentieth-century South. It symbolized the reconciliation between the once antagonistic regions, with southerners cheering northern drivers, and the lure of profit and development overcoming lingering provincialism. Fans flocked to tracks to satisfy their curiosity about technology, and spreading ownership of cars gradually made this encounter with technology more immediate. (This trend may explain why stock-car racing ultimately became the form of racing that endures most visibly in America; once most fans had cars of their own, they could then identify more readily with the shape of stock cars.) In its nascent period as now, the sport involved central management, business investments, civic boosterism, and commercial and promotional manipulation.

¹¹ Peter Applebome, *Dixie Rising: How the South Is Shaping American Values, Politics, and Culture* (New York, 1996).

¹² On the idea of the South as a "colonial economy" of the North see C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877–1913* (Baton Rouge, 1951), chap. 11; and Howard N. Rabinowitz, *The First New South, 1865–1920* (Arlington Heights, Ill., 1992), chap. 1.

Understanding the presence of widespread fan support for a corporate sport at this early time undermines the stereotypes of a golden age of spontaneity and folk authenticity in southern culture. In racing (as in country music—another often misunderstood symbol of the South), there has always been a combination of traditional and commercial sources, as southerners seeking entertainment creatively mixed whatever options were at hand.

Further, support of racing became a mark of distinction for southern cities. Some of the cities that most fully embraced automobile racing—Atlanta, Galveston, Charlotte—ranked among the most progressive urban areas in the South, and one might expect to find support for a cutting-edge sport there. However, businessmen in other cities such as Savannah and New Orleans, tagged by historians as sleepy and conservative New South laggards, also invested a great deal of time and effort in bringing this new sport and new technology to their towns. The crusade for racing exposes the presence in the early twentieth century of a certain element of forward-looking boosterism among the business elite of even the more conservative cities. Urban leaders recognized the symbolic as well as financial importance of the new technology as quickly as their counterparts in the North. Far from being victims of an isolated culture, some southerners took part in the national and even international trends of automotive development to the extent that they were able, and their interaction with northern racing organizations underscores the evolution of a national web among elite leaders and groups during this period of growing sectional reconciliation. The story of car racing complicates further any scholarly attempts to generalize about southerners.¹³

¹³ On the reconciliation of the regions at the end of the nineteenth century and the importance of contacts between northerners and southerners during the period, see Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865 to 1913* (New York and Oxford, 1987), esp. Part Three; Dewey W. Grantham, *The South in Modern America: A Region at Odds* (New York, 1994), chap. 2; and Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, Eng., and other cities, 1988), 72–80. On the conservatism of older port cities in comparison to cities such as Atlanta and Nashville, see Don H. Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860–1910* (Chapel Hill and London, 1990), esp. chap. 5. Doyle acknowledges that even in conservative cities some progressive businessmen looked toward economic change, and he hints that by 1910 (the end of the period he studies) newer ideas were gaining some strength there (pp. 175–88). David R. Goldfield also contrasts the lackluster postbellum fate of port cities with the growth of Atlanta and other newer towns in *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers: Southern City and Region, 1607–1980* (Baton Rouge and London, 1982), chap. 3. Goldfield touches on regional interaction as well. See also Elizabeth Hayes Turner, *Women, Culture, and Community: Religion and Reform in Galveston, 1880–1920* (New York and Oxford, 1997), 5–9, for a discussion of Galveston in the context of Doyle's argument. On country music's mix of commercial and "folk" sources see Bill C. Malone, *Singing Cowboys and Musical Mountaineers:*

Car racing premiered in America in the North in the mid-1890s and roared to life in the South by early 1903. Florida's beach resort communities of Ormond and Daytona played host to the first major auto races held in the region. Early each year from 1903 until 1910, citizens of these Sunshine State towns sponsored a tournament of automobile races that attracted the fastest cars in the nation and even garnered some international participation. The beach that stretched between Ormond and Daytona presented more than a dozen miles of hard, smooth sand. At low tide, the wide, straight expanse presented a safe spot for high speed. In 1902 a winter tourist to the area recognized the potential for racing on the beach and published a short article in the December issue of *Automobile* magazine calling for a winter racing meet. J. F. Hathaway of Massachusetts, a winter resident at Ormond, publicized the idea further, and *Automobile* magazine sent a correspondent, publicist William J. Morgan, to investigate. The result was a meet promoted by Morgan at the end of March.¹⁴ That first meet lasted three days, and highlights included one-mile, five-mile, and ten-mile speed trials by cars and motorcycles and a one-mile race among three gentlemen (including a Daytona doctor) in their Oldsmobile runabouts.¹⁵

The races succeeded in 1903 and the years following through a combination of strong local support and the enthusiasm of northern visitors. Northerners, who were already accustomed to wintering in Florida, arrived on special excursion trains and steamers or simply extended their winter visits to include the races, and area hotels and railroads, politicians, a car dealer, and motoring enthusiasts provided local backing. The railroad owned by Florida developer Henry M. Flagler approved lower rates for the transport of automobiles to Ormond, while his Ormond Hotel actively promoted the races and his garage worked to accommodate the racers. A local automobile club was necessary to gain the approval of the American Automobile Association for the proposed meet, and residents quickly created a new

Southern Culture and the Roots of Country Music (Athens, Ga., and London, 1993). This point is particularly important to note since Pete Daniel follows other writers in portraying country music as part of an outlaw culture as well. Daniel argues that "[b]lack and white musicians, stock car drivers, and their fans were on the cutting edge of wildness," yet Malone identifies at least some of country music's roots in tamer soils. Daniel, *Lost Revolutions*, 93; Malone, *Singing Cowboys and Musical Mountaineers*, chap. 2.

¹⁴ Dick Punnett, *Racing on the Rim: A History of the Annual Automobile Racing Tournaments Held on the Sands of the Ormond-Daytona Beach, Florida, 1903-1910* (Ormond Beach, Fla., 1997), vi-7; *Automobile*, February 7, 1903, pp. 180-81. For examples of international participation in the Florida races see *Automobile*, January 11, 1906, p. 132. *Automobile* was an important early trade publication published in New York from 1903 until 1917.

¹⁵ Punnett, *Racing on the Rim*, 8-14; *Automobile*, April 4, 1903, pp. 365-66 and pp. 386-87.

club in Jacksonville and one in Daytona and Ormond. The three to four thousand people in attendance at the 1903 meet reflected the largely elite base of support: "Bluff and beach were thronged with the summer-garbed crowds of fashionable men and women, who make up most of the winter population. There was a sprinkling of open-eyed and open-mouthed 'crackers,' and 'pickaninnies' tumbled and played about the beach in swarms."¹⁶ Spectators sat on the dunes, in cars parked along the edge of the racing route, and in grandstands constructed at both the Daytona and Ormond ends of the beach. Excursion trains brought residents not only from the Northeast and other areas of Florida but also from as far away as Minnesota. In 1906 the crowd reportedly numbered "several thousand," while one estimate put the 1907 crowd for the main event at three thousand persons.¹⁷ In their enthusiasm for promoting a competition in cooperation with the northern visitors, the local residents had taken action to advance the sectional reconciliation that was part of the so-called New South creed for regional development. The success of the racing events would ultimately prove helpful in encouraging northern visitors to flock to Florida by car and in even greater numbers than before. The budding tourism industry thus received a strong boost.¹⁸

For several years the Florida meet was an important feature of American racing, with top drivers coming from northern and midwestern cities to compete each winter. William Morgan promoted the races throughout the year from his home in New York, while businesses and members of the automobile club kept enthusiasm and financial support forthcoming locally. The beach between Ormond and Daytona gained national acclaim as "a mecca for motor enthusiasts" and "undoubtedly the greatest straightaway course for racing in the world."¹⁹ On each

¹⁶ Punnett, *Racing on the Rim*, 7; *Automobile*, March 21, 1903, p. 338, March 28, 1903, p. 363, April 4, 1903, pp. 365–66 and pp. 386–87 (quotation on p. 386), May 2, 1903, p. 491, August 29, 1903, p. 220, December 26, 1903, p. 676, and February 6, 1904, pp. 159–69; Edward N. Akin, *Flagler: Rockefeller Partner and Florida Baron* (Kent, Ohio, and London, 1988), 137, 200.

¹⁷ Punnett, *Racing on the Rim*, 44; *Automobile*, January 28, 1905, p. 166, February 4, 1905, p. 207, November 23, 1905, p. 587, and February 1, 1906, p. 280; *New York Times*, January 27, 1906, p. 1, January 28, 1906, p. 9 (quotation), January 30, 1906, p. 10, and January 21–25, 1907, p. 7.

¹⁸ Howard Lawrence Preston, *Dirt Roads to Dixie: Accessibility and Modernization in the South, 1885–1935* (Knoxville, 1991), 97; Preston, "Tourism, Automobile," in Wilson and Ferris, eds., *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, 1245–47; Paul M. Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (New York, 1970), chap. 3.

¹⁹ *New York Times*, January 2, 1910, sec. 4, p. 7. See also Fred J. Wagner (as told to John M. Mitchell), *The Saga of the Roaring Road* (2d ed.; Boston, 1938), 82–91. After the first event the Florida East Coast Hotel Company promoted the races for 1904 with "a very pretty little automobile love story . . ." The slender book, *The Auto Race at Ormond: A Story of Two Prizes*

occasion the meet lasted several days, and events featured cars, motorcycles, and sometimes bicycles. The wide variety of formats yielded speed records and close competition. For example, a newspaper report from March 1909 celebrated the fact that “[t]he seventh annual Daytona automobile races opened to-day with one bicycle, one motor cycle, and two automobile events, and in every event a new world’s record was established.” The 1904 meet included several races open only to “gentlemen amateur drivers,” usually wealthy northern sportsmen such as prominent racer William K. Vanderbilt Jr. (whose family had a long record of involvement in sport). Some races were limited to southern owners or Florida residents “in order to give cars in the Southern States and the local owners throughout the South a chance” One event even featured a “Florida stock car price class race” that categorized cars by price to consumers. Perhaps the most specific category was for a 1907 race: “Mile-a-minute, flying start, touring car racers for American championship, each car carrying four passengers.” Both professional racing cars, prepared by automobile factories, and stock cars, available to all, ran in the various races. The 1908 meet included a 150-mile run “for stock chassis,” and in 1909 organizers added to the program “an automobile race for 200 miles, open to stock cars”²⁰

In the earliest days of racing, rigid traditions for events had not yet been established (and there was no separate category denoting drag racing), though the AAA contest committee rapidly brought order to the new sport. The one-mile speed trial gained perhaps the most attention in early meets, but racers also ran trial distances of two, five, and ten miles. In 1904 the longest event was a fifty-mile race won by Vanderbilt, but in 1905 the tournament peaked with a 100-mile run for a prize sponsored by Vanderbilt. The ten starters departed at one-minute intervals and ran against each other and the clock. Turns were the most difficult part of running fast speeds on flat stretches. In some races the rules mandated that cars stop at the turns in the interest of safety, while in other races the drivers simply slowed almost to a crawl

([St. Augustine, Fla.?], 1903), told of the social delights of Ormond as well as the thrill of the races. It was only one of a series of booklets and pamphlets that the company, which was owned by the preeminent developer of Florida’s eastern coast, Henry M. Flagler, used to promote the area. *Automobile*, December 12, 1903, p. 631 (quotation); Akin, *Flagler*, 200.

²⁰ *New York Times*, March 24, 1909, p. 11 (first quotation), January 24, 1904, p. 11, January 29, 1904, p. 1 (second quotation), February 6, 1909, p. 7 (third and fourth quotations), January 15, 1907, p. 9 (fifth quotation), March 4, 1908, p. 5 (sixth quotation), and March 24, 1909, p. 11 (seventh quotation).

to turn around the stake at the end of the course. By 1908 organizers recognized longer races as the format of the future, scheduling feature events of 100, 125, and 300 miles. In a contest using the entire sixteen miles of beach, a circuit of thirty-two miles, Emanuel Cedrino set a record for 300 miles by averaging seventy-seven miles an hour.²¹ Speed trials would remain a recognized form of testing automotive engineering and would later produce the official sport of drag racing, but after the first few years at Daytona, the focus of the racing world became multi-car, longer-distance races on beach courses, road courses, or oval tracks.

The events on the beach introduced several features that became lasting parts of auto racing in the South. Begun just as the Progressive era started to gain momentum in the South, the race meets initiated the linking of southern politics and car racing. In 1903 Florida advocates of good roads used the occasion to trumpet their cause, while in 1904 the national Good Roads Association held a meeting in conjunction with the race meet, with a list of speakers that included William S. Jennings, the governor of Florida. Among the enjoyable "social features of the tournament" in 1904 was a benefit ball for the association. As racing spread in the region, other southern automobile clubs chose races as outlets to spread their message on the necessity of building good roads.²² Politics of a different vein, the politics of gender, surfaced when the Florida East Coast Automobile Association (FECAA) sponsored a contest in 1906 to select "the prettiest girl in Florida," with the fourteen-year-old winner crowning the "speed king." For decades hence, racers, like football players in the 1920s, would battle symbolically in almost medieval fashion in order to be the victor and claim the plaudits of a chosen maiden. In the protean world of early car racing, the traditional norms of gender relations rested comfortably alongside

²¹ *New York Times*, January 31, 1904, p. 1, January 31, 1905, p. 6, February 1, 1905, p. 6, and March 6, 1908, p. 8; *Automobile*, February 4, 1905, pp. 208–9; Punnett, *Racing on the Rim*, 72, 100. For AAA racing rules see American Automobile Association Contest Board, *Official Competition Rules* . . . ([New York, 1906]), 6–15; and *Automobile*, May 6, 1905, pp. 559–61.

²² *Automobile*, April 4, 1903, p. 387, and February 6, 1904, p. 162 (quotation), p. 164; *New York Times*, January 29, 1904, p. 1. On the complexities of the good roads movement as part of southern Progressivism see Howard L. Preston, "Good Roads Movement," in Wilson and Ferris, eds., *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, 22–23; Preston, *Dirt Roads to Dixie*, chaps. 1 and 2; and Dewey W. Grantham, *Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition* (Knoxville, 1983), 307–10. Three of many more recent examples of linking politics and racing include President Ronald Reagan attending a 1984 race at Daytona, President George Bush attending in 1992, and presidential candidate George W. Bush attending a race there in 2000. Tom Higgins, *NASCAR Greatest Races: The 25 Most Thrilling Races in NASCAR History* (New York, 1999), 26–29; Tampa *Tribune*, July 2, 2000, Sports, p. 1.

Progressive movements that almost always involved women in new and powerful roles during this transitional period.²³

The Ormond-Daytona races developed amid a climate of civic boosterism and rivalry among cities, another political (and economic) pattern that holds true in sports promotion today. The first tournament almost stumbled when the northern promoter and competing automobile clubs in Jacksonville and the Daytona-Ormond area reached agreement barely in time to gain AAA sanction for the meet. The competition between the cities continued, though. The Florida East Coast Automobile Association was created in 1903 to serve as an overarching body; however, it soon came under control of Daytona partisans who desired to switch the focal point of the events to the Daytona end of the beach. In 1905 they took management of the races away from the northerner William Morgan, but chaos ensued to the point that Morgan was reinstated to direct events the next year. The tournament survived these problems, but civic competition ironically contributed both to initial popular backing and to subsequent instances of poor management. In 1908 the *New York Times* cited inadequate organization as one reason that “[t]his has been the first time since the establishment of Winter racing on the Florida beach five years ago that any lack of enthusiasm has been noticed among motorists for this big Southern contest of motor speed.”²⁴ In its last three years the Ormond-Daytona event “petered out, interest not running nearly as high as in previous seasons.” Daytona turned to a flying exhibition as its flagship civic event. The beach at Daytona and Ormond had been momentarily surpassed in the racing world (though time trials would intermittently occur there until the 1930s, and NASCAR would later restore the area to racing prestige), but even its first era of national renown had aided the burgeoning tourist industry.²⁵

²³ *Automobile*, February 1, 1906, pp. 271, 276; Punnett, *Racing on the Rim*, 53–54 (quotations on p. 53); Doyle, “Turning the Tide,” 38. For examples of the extensive literature discussing women in the Progressive movement see Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896–1920* (Chapel Hill and London, 1996); Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, *New Women of the New South: The Leaders of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the Southern States* (New York and Oxford, 1993); and John Patrick McDowell, *The Social Gospel in the South: The Woman’s Home Mission Movement in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1886–1939* (Baton Rouge and London, 1982).

²⁴ Punnett, *Racing on the Rim*, 7, 12, 28, and 35; *New York Times*, February 17, 1908, p. 5 (quotation); *Automobile*, March 21, 1903, p. 338, March 28, 1903, p. 363, April 4, 1903, pp. 366, 387, May 2, 1903, p. 491, June 13, 1903, pp. 631–32, January 14, 1905, p. 91, February 4, 1905, pp. 201–2 and pp. 210–11, and March 11, 1905, p. 375.

²⁵ *New York Times*, January 2, 1910, sec. 4, p. 7 (quotation); Wagner, *Saga of the Roaring Road*, 91–98; Punnett, *Racing on the Rim*, 95–96.

The decline of enthusiasm at Ormond and Daytona reflected local fatigue, not a southern indifference to racing. In 1910, when Ormond-Daytona residents showed hesitation in providing the necessary funding, the focus of racing fans in Florida shifted to an AAA-sanctioned meet in nearby Jacksonville on its Pablo Beach. The Jacksonville Automobile and Motor Boat Club had planned events as early as 1905, and racing had also come to the beach at St. Augustine in 1906.²⁶ Other southern cities outside Florida quickly noticed the potential of car racing once the Ormond-Daytona events had begun in 1903, and competitions of local and regional importance proliferated. Louisville staged one of the earliest events in August 1903, when the local Knights Templar organization sponsored a parade of local cars and an automobile race on the Churchill Downs horse track. Twelve thousand spectators, "Southern gentlemen and Southern belles," created an atmosphere that some considered to be much like that of the Kentucky Derby.²⁷ Racing reached San Antonio in October 1903 and Houston in November of that year, and it debuted in Savannah in February, Baltimore in July, and Nashville in June 1904, where the meet coincided with a massive reunion of Confederate soldiers in a symbolic collision of old and new. In Macon, Georgia, car enthusiasts formed the Macon Automobile Association in 1903, hoping to promote a racing event (though not until May 1906 did the club successfully conduct a meet). By the winter of 1904 rumors even circulated of a southern racing circuit that would include events in Louisville, Nashville, Memphis, and New Orleans during the winter months, when racing was unwieldy farther north.²⁸

A major issue facing all early race organizers was the safety of drivers and spectators. On the poor roads and makeshift courses that hosted races, spectators were often in danger if cars wrecked, and both racers and bystanders risked peril when overeager fans wandered onto

²⁶ *Automobile*, June 22, 1905, p. 761, March 1, 1906, p. 462, March 15, 1906, p. 526, and April 19, 1906, pp. 661–62; Punnett, *Racing on the Rim*, 95–96.

²⁷ *Automobile*, August 22, 1903, pp. 182–84 (quotation on p. 182); *Horseless Age*, August 26, 1903, pp. 229–30. For discussion of a later car race on Churchill Downs see *New York Times*, July 9, 1910, p. 9; and Louisville *Courier-Journal*, July 3, 7, 8, 9, and 10, 1910.

²⁸ *Automobile*, September 26, 1903, p. 302, November 7, 1903, p. 492, December 12, 1903, p. 630, March 12, 1904, p. 299, June 25, 1904, p. 694, July 9, 1904, p. 49, November 12, 1904, p. 560, and May 24, 1906, p. 845; *Horseless Age*, September 16, 1903, p. 310, and December 9, 1903, p. 607. The Virginia East Coast Automobile Association was created to promote a meet on Virginia Beach, but the beach proved to be inappropriate for racing. *Automobile*, February 20, 1904, p. 240, and March 19, 1904, p. 315. For reports of other early southern racing activity see *Automobile*, September 10, 1904, p. 302, April 1, 1905, p. 449, June 15, 1905, pp. 736–37, June 22, 1905, p. 763, July 13, 1905, pp. 54–55, and April 19, 1906, p. 685.

the race course or pressed into the path of cars during the enthusiasm of a close contest. The wide, open beaches of Florida seemed to offer secure areas for the crowds and a safer course for racers. However, in the badly managed 1905 tournament, one journalist reported poor crowd control as “[p]eople walked all over the course,” and in 1906 a driver had to slow down to avoid a touring car that had driven onto the course. For the most part, though, officials kept interference by fans to a minimum. For part of the 1910 meet, uniformed soldiers even assisted in patrolling the course.²⁹ Fans’ disregard for their personal safety demonstrates their profound fascination with the new technology. Perhaps only the popular response to the first train engines presents an equally clear example of the excitement produced by new forms of machinery that embodied change. The arrival of railroads and trains heralded modernization and economic progress and roused a mix of curiosity, excitement, fear, and anticipation.³⁰ As car racing spread across the South before World War I, much of its early popularity can be attributed to this ambivalent but deeply held attraction to the automobile. Unaccustomed to the disciplined viewing of spectator sports, fans could become too excited by the experience.

Similar concerns about safety were the catalysts that eventually brought another major racing event to the South in the early years of auto racing in the United States. In early 1904 William K. Vanderbilt Jr. began sponsoring a trophy for the winner of an annual contest modeled on the great international races of Europe. The Vanderbilt Cup race made its debut in October 1904 on a course on Long Island, with teams competing from four nations. The French team won in 1904 and 1905, thereby removing the race to France in 1906. After a one-year hiatus, it returned to Long Island in 1908, and drivers began competing as individuals rather than as members of national teams.³¹

When the 1907 Vanderbilt competition was canceled due to concerns about security, prominent citizens of Savannah, Georgia, recognized their opportunity and developed a plan to upstage northern cities for the right to host what had rapidly become racing’s most important

²⁹ Punnett, *Racing on the Rim*, 18, 36 (quotation); *New York Times*, January 25, 1906, p. 7, and March 24, 1910, p. 10. Officials used flags of varying colors to signal racers. Interestingly, in some cases through at least the 1920s, red, rather than the current green, meant full speed, clear course ahead. Julian K. Quattlebaum, *The Great Savannah Races* (Columbia, S.C., 1957; reprint, with a new introduction, Athens, Ga., 1983), 29; *Charlotte Observer*, August 22, 1926, sec. 5, p. 1.

³⁰ Edward L. Ayers has some discussion of the feelings generated by railroads in *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York and Oxford, 1992), 10–13.

³¹ *New York Times*, January 2, 1910, sec. 4, p. 7. On the Vanderbilt Cup races see also Chris Sinsabaugh, *Who, Me? Forty Years of Automobile History* (Detroit, 1940), chap. 14.

American contest. Because of popular opposition, the governor of New York had refused to provide troops to guard the roads on which the race was to be run. Members of the Savannah Automobile Club decided to prove that their city could host a secure race, with the hope that they could then bid successfully for the Vanderbilt Cup event. In December 1907 the AAA sanctioned a road race for stock cars to be held in Savannah in March 1908, carefully scheduled to allow the participants to travel there after the Ormond-Daytona races. By early March drivers had made plans to ship their vehicles, and northern race fans arranged groups to travel together to Savannah. As with other southern venues, the AAA found several factors in Savannah's favor in evaluating the request for sanction. In addition to security issues, Savannah benefited from the natural momentum of the cars already being in the South for the competitions at Daytona (and later Atlanta), and it could boast a balmy spring climate, a factor that aided other southern cities as well. While northern and midwestern locations had a full slate of early races, these factors helped the South to begin to gain and for a time maintain racing parity. A solid front of governmental support, perhaps smoothed by the South's de facto one-party system, helped greatly in each case as well. The Savannah races had the full backing of Mayor George W. Tiedeman and Governor Hoke Smith, both of whom acted as honorary referees. The club constructed a course of nearly twenty miles, banked the eleven turns, and oiled the surface to keep down dust.³² The races ranked as a solid success. Two races of 180 miles each took place on March 18, 1908, for small cars, and though marred by the small number of competitors and problems of automobile durability (only one car finished in the race for six-cylinder machines), the races generated some interest. The next day, the 342-mile, twenty-lap race for more powerful machines attracted a crowd estimated at 30,000 persons. They saw a lively race (with eight starters), run at an average speed of fifty-four miles per hour and won by nationally known driver Louis Strang.³³

One direct source of Savannah's success in racing was the city's willingness to use the machinery of the state to maintain discipline. Local and state officials were so devoted to the goal of bringing their city to positive national attention through a modern event that they provided troops to aid this private undertaking, whereas the state of

³² *New York Times*, December 29, 1907, sec. 4, p. 4, March 8, 1908, sec. 4, p. 3, and March 15, 1908, sec. 4, p. 3.

³³ *New York Times*, March 19, 1908, p. 8, and March 20, 1908, p. 8.

New York had refused to do so. The *New York Times* reported that the races would be “the first automobile contests ever held in this country which will have the aid of the militia to guard the course.” The presence of troops proved necessary at the main event, for when one car had mechanical problems, one reporter noted, a “great crowd ran out on the course to see the machine, and it was with the greatest difficulty that [the militia captain] and his officers prevented several persons from being run down.”³⁴ Though the Vanderbilt Cup race officials decided to rebuff Savannah’s bid for their event in 1908, the secure course and smooth surface at Savannah received much praise. As a result, the Automobile Club of America (ACA), a rival of the AAA, sanctioned an international race, the Grand Prize, to be held there in the fall of 1908, choosing Savannah over St. Louis. Typical of a region that brutally exploited the labor of prisoners for the construction of roads, convict laborers laid out an expanded course, approximately twenty-five miles in length with thirty-two curves, for the Grand Prize, along with a simpler 9.8-mile course for a light-car event the preceding day. The promise of military and police security for the track was the important attraction for the ACA officials who would oversee the event; the militant willingness to threaten and to use violence, a stereotypical view of southerners but one confirmed somewhat by scholarship, ironically had helped to lure the most modern and international of sports to Georgia.³⁵

The Grand Prize race brought to Savannah an astonishingly cosmopolitan lineup, a real rarity for any event in the South in the first decade of the twentieth century. French, Italian, German, and American racing teams battled in the two races on November 25 and 26, 1908. About 1,600 militia troops guarded the roads, and over 150 flagmen around the winding course communicated to drivers the conditions they should expect around the sharp curves. Linked by telephones, these spotters

³⁴ *New York Times*, March 15, 1908, sec. 4, p. 4 (first quotation), and March 20, 1908, p. 8 (second quotation).

³⁵ *New York Times*, May 22, 1908, p. 5, and July 26, 1908, sec. 4, p. 4; Quattlebaum, *Great Savannah Races*, 11–17. On the use of convicts in building roads in Georgia see Alex Lichtenstein, “Good Roads and Chain Gangs in the Progressive South: ‘The Negro Convict is a Slave,’” *Journal of Southern History*, 59 (February 1993), 85–110. On southerners, violence, and the military see Jack Temple Kirby, *Darkness at the Dawning: Race and Reform in the Progressive South* (Philadelphia, New York, and Toronto, 1972), 32–35; Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 158–60; Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 153–59; Rod Andrew Jr., “Soldiers, Christians, and Patriots: The Lost Cause and Southern Military Schools, 1865–1915,” *Journal of Southern History*, 64 (November 1998), 677–710; and John Hawkins Napier III, “Military Tradition,” 641–43, and Robert E. May, “Fighting South,” 1107–8, both in Wilson and Ferris, eds., *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*. For more on the Automobile Club of America see Automobile Club of America, *Year Book: 1907* (New York, n.d.), esp. 11–18.

also relayed information back to the main grandstand area (which was expanded by 5,000 seats the night before the principal race). Though only a few years after racing had begun at Daytona, the AAA and ACA already had detailed systems of classifying cars by cubic inches of piston displacement and their weight. The 196-mile event for light cars provided good competition and was celebrated at a party on an elegant ship, attended by 250 guests from Savannah's elite. For the Grand Prize race the following day, drivers turned sixteen laps, a total of 402 miles. At an average speed of over sixty-five miles per hour, the Italian winner eclipsed the French runner-up by a mere fifty-six seconds. The crowd, estimated by a northern newspaper correspondent at over 150,000 persons (and including a special trainload of New York worthies), strained Savannah's accommodations, but the event brought unprecedented praise and publicity to the proud city. Once again, the militia announced its presence and usefulness, wounding one person who sought to drive a buggy across the track during the event.³⁶

Despite some setbacks, the new sport thrived in Savannah, though the Georgians' jubilation was short-lived. After the first Grand Prize event, reconciliation between the AAA and the ACA cleared the way to move the race to Long Island to accompany the Vanderbilt Cup, illustrating the reality of regional power despite the momentary ebullience in Georgia. The Grand Prize race was not held in 1909, but it was scheduled to occur following the Vanderbilt event on Long Island in 1910. However, inadequate crowd control led to a spectator's death at the Vanderbilt Cup race on October 1, and the Grand Prize race, slated for two weeks later, was canceled. At the suggestion of Vanderbilt, Mayor Tiedeman immediately proposed rescheduling the Grand Prize in Savannah in November. Though a track near Los Angeles also submitted a bid, the ACA approved two light-car races and the Grand Prize to take place on a redesigned course in and around Savannah on November 11 and 12, 1910. Convict laborers hurriedly prepared the roads and built grandstands, and special excursion trains again filled Savannah with excited fans. The Grand Prize racers covered twenty-four laps on a 17.3-mile course for a 415.2 mile race, and an American driver captured the victory by an exceptionally slim margin of 1.42 seconds, averaging over seventy miles per hour. The most pleased members of the crowd, again estimated at over 100,000 per-

³⁶ Quattlebaum, *Great Savannah Races*, 17–49; *New York Times*, November 15, 1908, sec. 4, p. 4, November 24, 1908, p. 7, November 27, 1908, p. 6, and December 6, 1908, sec. 1, p. 1 (photo spread).

sons, may have been the convict laborers, who were allowed to watch from the shade of an oak tree near the grandstands they had built, their presence being a rare recognition of the humanity of imprisoned labor. Northern visitors took note of the men in their leg chains and striped clothing, along with their rifle-carrying guard. Georgia's governor celebrated the day a bit differently, at a dinner given in his honor by the journalists from New York in the dining car of their special train. The juxtaposition of the two extremes leaves little doubt about the broad appeal of early racing.³⁷

The following year, in November 1911, Savannah reached the summit of its climb in the racing world. Not only did the city again secure the Grand Prize race and its accompanying events for light cars, but Savannah boosters also achieved their longtime desire to host the race for the Vanderbilt Cup (despite a rumored competing bid from Oklahoma City). AAA official Fred Wagner pronounced in a New York paper that "it looks as though the coming automobile speed carnival . . . over the finest road course in the world will be the greatest automobile meet ever held in this country." Once again an international cast of top drivers faced off in front of huge crowds in events that were great successes. The day after the Grand Prize race Wagner confirmed, "The pick of the entire automobile world, both here and abroad, participated in this race," which was "the fastest motor car race ever held."³⁸ As in Florida, the influx of northern visitors and the positive notice helped to bring more tourists to Savannah, and many came by car, eager to try the South's improving roadways. A Georgia good roads group brought sixty cars filled with almost two hundred people to the 1911 races in support of better roads. Savannah's boosters had realized their hopes that the races would bring publicity and progress.³⁹

The excitement of new technologies and national attention proved as fleeting in Savannah as it had in Daytona. Savannah had achieved the pinnacle of early American auto racing, and its will to stage another racing meet drained away. The increase in local ownership of automobiles created much opposition to closing the roads for days, as the races necessitated. In fact, before the 1911 events, racers practiced on

³⁷ Quattlebaum, *Great Savannah Races*, 53–83; *New York Times*, September 22, 1908, p. 7, October 2, 1910, sec. 4, pp. 5–6, October 7, 1910, p. 1, October 8, 1910, p. 12, October 11, 1910, p. 13, and October 12, 1910, p. 10.

³⁸ *New York Times*, November 27, 1911, p. 13 (first quotation), and December 1, 1911, p. 9 (second and third quotations); *Fort Worth Record*, June 4, 1911.

³⁹ Preston, *Dirt Roads to Dixie*, 97, 101; *New York Times*, November 26, 1911, sec. 4, p. 16. Savannah had gained national attention for the quality of its convict-built roads as early as 1903. See *Automobile*, January 3, 1903, pp. 1–2; and *Horseless Age*, September 2, 1903, p. 243.

roads used simultaneously by local residents. One racer died when he swerved to avoid a wagon, and another sustained serious injury dodging a passenger car. On the day following the Grand Prize, Wagner already predicted, "It is pretty certain that application will not be made for some time for another race" Even Mayor Tiedeman was pessimistic, and the races' strongest boosters had grown tired. Further, "[t]he military is another feature. Privates of the companies state they have had enough of duty and several of them failed to show up on the course" The Grand Prize had been held on Thanksgiving Day, and as a final factor in the meet's demise, the *New York Times* recorded, "There is a strong sentiment in Savannah started by the clergy to do away with auto racing on the National T[h]anksgiving Day."⁴⁰ In March 1912 the Savannah Automobile Club officially announced that it would not seek an event that year, standing aside as Milwaukee overcame Dallas in feverish bidding to hold the Vanderbilt Cup and the Grand Prize races. By 1913 Savannah had changed its mind and again procured sanction for the events, but a lack of entries doomed the club's attempt at resuscitation.⁴¹

Today, many observers classify racing fans as a working-class group and emphasize the sport's appeal to men, but in its infancy, racing attracted a quite varied following. Hierarchy and patriarchy nevertheless characterized the southern social structure into the twentieth century, and the world of racing replicated that rigidity. In the early years of racing, as at present, men almost exclusively filled the ranks of drivers, but enthusiasts of the sport included people of both sexes and from all levels of society. At Savannah and the Florida resorts, as at other race sites emerging in the South, racing fever caught entire communities in its grip, raising the contests to a level of importance that made them social events appropriate for even the most elevated men and women of the city. Though quantitative comparisons of attendance by sex are impossible, the speed contests became social occasions of such civic significance as to be perfectly acceptable venues for women. Photographs of grandstands show fashionable couples (including "an array of brilliantly gowned women") watching together, and the promoters of the races generally included the most esteemed members of the business and political communities. Accommodations for specta-

⁴⁰ *New York Times*, December 1, 1911, p. 9 (first and second quotations), and December 2, 1911, p. 11 (third quotation).

⁴¹ *New York Times*, March 9, 1912, p. 11, April 6, 1912, p. 13, April 7, 1912, sec. 4, p. 10, July 21, 1912, sec. 7, p. 11; January 7, 1913, p. 12, September 21, 1913, sec. 4, p. 4, and October 4, 1913, p. 14.

tors reflected their differing social stations. At Savannah, some of the city's so-called Four Hundred, the social elite, had decoratively festooned private boxes. Expensive seating in covered grandstands or box seats often allowed the wealthy to maintain their distance from the less illustrious attendees, even as their joint participation demonstrated the civic pride that powered the events from the beginning. Though their presence is more difficult to discern from historical records, blacks also attended at least some racing events.⁴²

The leading drivers themselves came from various locations around the country (and the world in the case of the Grand Prize race and some events in Florida). Races before World War I often included local drivers sponsored perhaps by car dealers or even wealthy men underwriting their own teams, but by this stage, many top competitors were professional drivers following the circuit as members of multi-driver race teams supported by the sponsorship and technical backing of automobile factories. Men such as Ralph de Palma, Barney Oldfield, David Bruce-Brown, Louis Wagner, Ralph Mulford, Louis Strang, and Victor Hemery drove such makes of car as Benz, Fiat, Pope-Hartford, Abbott-Detroit, and Marmon.⁴³ Distinctions between true stock cars and modified racing machines gradually became a recognized part of racing contests. In 1910 the eligible makes for a stock-car event in New Orleans included a mix of the familiar and the now-forgotten: Packard, Buick, Jackson, Oakland, Thomas, National, Stoddard, Dayton, Knox, and Pope-Toledo.⁴⁴ The specialized racing machines would retain open cockpits (as did the stock cars initially). They were the forebears of the style of cars today associated with Indianapolis and the Grand Prix, in contrast to the stock cars (themselves now "stock" only in shape and promotional literature) that brought NASCAR to fame.

⁴² *New York Times*, November 12, 1910, p. 10 (quotation), and November 28, 1911, p. 14. See also *Charlotte Observer*, May 3, 1925, p. D3, for a picture of industrialist James B. Duke and various couples in box seats at a race in Charlotte; *Atlanta Constitution*, November 7, 1909, p. B6, for the differing prices of bleacher and grandstand seats; *Nashville Banner*, September 2, 1913, for an accident allegedly caused by a black child in attendance; and Punnett, *Racing on the Rim*, and Quattlebaum, *Great Savannah Races*, for various photographs that provide glimpses of fans and grandstands.

⁴³ Quattlebaum, *Great Savannah Races*, details the names of many drivers and the makes of their automobiles. Robert Arthur Cutter and Bob Fendell, *The Encyclopedia of Auto Racing Greats* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1973) is another good source of information on early drivers and their varied (and sometimes privileged) backgrounds. William F. Nolan's imaginative popular biography of Barney Oldfield not only recounts Oldfield's colorful exploits but also has many stories about other early drivers. Nolan, *Barney Oldfield: The Life and Times of America's Legendary Speed King* (New York, 1961). Wagner, *Saga of the Roaring Road*, includes a great deal about drivers from throughout the period covered in this article.

⁴⁴ *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, February 5, 1910, p. 6.

Whereas today Indy cars race in relatively few southern venues, the early races examined here included an exciting array of the styles in their infancy, and many of the teams and drivers fielded cars of both types in any given racing meet.

Nationally significant southern racing soon spread beyond the southeastern coast, and a full cast of prominent teams and drivers introduced other areas to the daring sport. Much as in Savannah and Daytona, automobile racing enjoyed a brief period of popularity in the declining old port city of New Orleans between 1908 and 1911. Belying its reputation as a city slow to acknowledge change, New Orleans moved early to explore the new technology and its attendant opportunities for civic promotion. Though racing fever did not dominate New Orleans as sharply as it did Savannah, the Crescent City lived up to its colorful reputation by adding unique features to the usual program. A relatively small event in November 1908 aroused sufficient interest among the city's residents to add automobile racing to New Orleans's famous Mardi Gras celebration in February 1909. From February 20 to 22, the New Orleans Automobile Club conducted its racing "carnival" before crowds of about 5,000 to 6,000 at the one-mile Fair Grounds track. There was some truth in the *Picayune's* claim that the event would "bring together the most renowned cars of the world, with America's greatest drivers at the wheels." Several top national drivers indeed took part, including wealthy amateur racer Joan Newton Cuneo. Almost without peer in racing, this northern woman held her own amid the tough competition and won several events. Races ranged from one mile to one hundred miles, with several events scheduled each day for such categories as stock cars, racing cars, New Orleans drivers, and competitors from within Louisiana.⁴⁵ Appropriate for a city steeped in tradition, the events took place on a track well known only for horse racing, a powerfully symbolic sport that had long captured the allegiance of southern white men of all types. The acceptance of new possibilities even on such important physical space emphasizes the strength of the automobile's hold on the imaginations of early-

⁴⁵ New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, February 17, 1909, p. 10, February 18, 1909, p. 10, February 19, 1909, p. 10, February 20, 1909, p. 10 (quotation), February 21, 1909, p. 14, February 22, 1909, p. 12, and February 23, 1909, p. 10; New York *Times*, January 10, 1909, sec. 4, p. 1, February 7, 1909, sec. 4, p. 4, February 21, 1909, sec. 4, p. 4, February 22, 1909, p. 7, February 23, 1909, p. 10, and February 28, 1909, sec. 4, p. 4. For a picture of Cuneo at the wheel of a racer see New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, February 19, 1909, p. 10. New Orleans car enthusiasts had maintained a local presence for several years, having formed what was reportedly the South's first automobile club in late 1902. *Automobile*, January 10, 1903, p. 45.

twentieth-century southerners. Enjoyment of daring, speed, and competition could remain steady on the same tracks despite modernizing technological changes. In racing, as in other cultural arenas explored by historians, tradition and change nestled together, though in sport the mix could be quite congenial.⁴⁶

In 1910 the Mardi Gras festivities included a two-day race meet that attracted several top drivers and brought crowds of 3,000 to 5,000 to the Fair Grounds track. Events again included an assortment of stock-car races and “free-for-all” competitions for the modified racing machines. As in other cities, spectators represented all social levels. Despite the smaller crowds, “[s]ociety was out in force,” with grandstands filled and spectators in passenger cars lined along the inner rail inside the oval. Further, “[m]any persons wore Carnival colors and carried bright banners appropriate to the occasion. Excellent music by a local band was a pleasant feature.” Adding to the interest was the entry of a local racing champion who had triumphed in road races at Jeanerette and on a track at Baton Rouge.⁴⁷

New Orleans continued to host automobile meets. In November 1910 the New Orleans Automobile Club joined with the Business Men’s League to sponsor the Fall Speed Carnival and Agricultural Exhibition at the fairgrounds. Exhibits of progressive farming techniques accompanied a schedule of seven races involving drivers from New Orleans and nearby cities.⁴⁸ In February 1911 Mardi Gras again included a major race meet, but the associated exhibition was a more symbiotic one, as dealers developed the city’s first automobile and motorboat show. The “marvelous growth in the sales of local agencies during the past year” had justifiably led to much optimism on the part of local auto sales companies. The races themselves were again successful, but more importantly, they had served their purposes of marking New Orleans businessmen as progressive and publicizing the automobile to potential consumers. Only the auto show remained on the next Mardi Gras program. Sponsored by the Automobile Dealers’

⁴⁶ On the cultural significance of horse races (and the closely linked ritual of gambling) in the South see Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*, 98–101; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South* (New York and Oxford, 1986), 131–42; and Dale A. Somers, *The Rise of Sports in New Orleans, 1850–1900* (Baton Rouge, 1972), 24–37, 91–114.

⁴⁷ *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, February 2, 1910, p. 12, February 5, 1910, p. 6, and February 6, 1910, p. 14 (quotations); *New York Times*, February 6, 1910, sec. 4, p. 4, and February 7, 1910, p. 7.

⁴⁸ *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, November 2, 1910, p. 10, November 24, 1910, p. 13, November 26, 1910, p. 10, November 27, 1910, p. 14, and November 28, 1910, p. 10.

Association, the show was managed by one of the former promoters of the racing meets.⁴⁹

Automobile enthusiasts in neighboring Texas enjoyed an even more active schedule of events than their counterparts in Louisiana, with boosters creating events in San Antonio, Dallas, Taylor (near Austin), Amarillo, Wichita Falls, and Waco.⁵⁰ By far the most important races in Texas, however, were a series of six meets held in Galveston each July or August from 1909 until 1914 as part of that island city's annual cotton carnival. Galveston had been virtually destroyed by a hurricane in 1900, and in 1909 it was still struggling to recover its former prominence. Leaders of such groups as the Business League and the Cotton Exchange, seeking to showcase the rebuilt city, created the carnival in the summer of 1909 to celebrate the port's major cargo. The affair acquired a great significance: "It means that our people will take on new life. It means a proposition upon which we can all stand united. It means the importing of a new impetus to every energy in our city's life; for cotton is the foundation upon which we must build. . . . Galveston will be swept on to fortune—to prosperity." With the cooperation of the Galveston Automobile Club, automobile racing was an integral part

⁴⁹ New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, February 22, 1911, p. 10, February 23, 1911, p. 12, February 25, 1911, p. 12, February 26, 1911, p. 3 (quotation), February 27, 1911, p. 12, February 28, 1911, p. 12, and February 18, 1912, sec. 2, p. 12. Another Louisiana city also added automobile racing to its major carnival. Shreveport hosted the Louisiana State Fair each fall, and from around 1910 until 1917, car racing joined the other celebratory exhibits and events. Nationally known drivers appeared alongside local favorites to face the challenge of the one-mile dirt track, initially sharing the bill with a series of horse races. At these races a particular favorite—a southerner competing successfully at the national level—was George "Texas" Clark (who won frequently at the San Antonio dirt track and at the annual race at the Texas State Fair in Dallas but who also did well at more prominent tracks across the country). As in New Orleans, automobile dealers at times capitalized on the occasion for an automobile exhibition. Shreveport *Caucasian*, October 20, 1912; Shreveport *Times*, November 2–7, 1912, November 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 12, and 13, 1913, November 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12, 1914, November 4 and 8, 1915, November 2, 1916, and November 3, 4, and 5, 1917. In 1913 the Ewing Motion Picture Company took advantage of the Shreveport races to film scenes for a motion picture. Unable to film the racers at full speed, the producers borrowed a local attorney's car to carry them around the track. Then, "the motion picture machine, with operator and assistants, were placed inside, and the racers at a speed not more than twenty-five or thirty miles an hour, followed the car around the course, zig-zagging the cars and making other motions, which in the picture would indicate terrific speed." Shreveport *Times*, November 13, 1913. Filmmakers thus blended the new technologies of the automobile and the motion picture, and the racing film was a popular genre for a time.

⁵⁰ Galveston *Daily News*, July 31, 1909, p. 5, August 1, 1909, p. 1, August 2, 1909, p. 4, August 4, 1909, p. 4, July 4, 1913, p. 8, July 5, 1913, p. 9; New York *Times*, October 24, 1910, p. 1, March 12, 1911, sec. 4, p. 6, January 12, 1913, sec. 8, p. 13, and July 23, 1913, p. 13. In 1909 a correspondent in Waco captured racing's importance to a town: "The spirit of the race track has permeated the entire population of Waco. . . . The scenes on the streets leading to Gurley Race Park, with the endless procession of vehicles, all loaded, and the long specials over the San Antonio & Aransas Pass, every car crowded, told the story that a new era has dawned on the land and that Waco is taking its place in modernism." Galveston *Daily News*, July 31, 1909, p. 5.

of the festivities from the beginning, for it was “the coming races that will make the Galveston beach as famous as any the world now knows”⁵¹ As part of an anxious desire to recapture past glory, a sort of ghost dance or revitalization movement, Galveston residents sought to venerate the most traditional of southern crops, cotton, with the most cutting-edge southern sport. The civic stakes for racing in somewhat-beleaguered Galveston were greater than in most cities.

Under AAA sanction, the races did attract the attention of the racing world to Galveston. Entries the first year came mostly from within Texas for events that ranged up to fifty miles in length. The track ran up to two and a half miles down the beach (up to a five-mile circuit), depending on the length of the race. On race day, organizers confronted the security problems that plagued courses on the East Coast, as three policemen faced fifteen thousand eager spectators who ignored rope boundaries and “crowded upon the track so that it seemed impossible to run at all.” Nonetheless, the races (and the carnival) were considered “the greatest success.”⁵² The following year better preparations were made for a more extensive schedule of races; one policeman explained, “The course must be kept clear, even if we have to use violence to accomplish the work that has been assigned to us. It would look very bad in the eyes of all other states that are watching with interest the Galveston speedway should some fatality result in this meet.” The entry list included more major national drivers in 1910. Before an audience of thousands, twelve starters roared off for the 200-mile main event as the band played “Dixie.” A twenty-year-old Texan named Tobin de Hymel triumphed in a record-setting performance.⁵³

Over the next few years some of racing’s finest drivers came to Galveston for the cotton carnival, despite the rarity of holding a nationally important race in the Deep South during the hottest time of summer. Races extended up to three hundred miles in length, and crowds regularly numbered near or above ten thousand people. Some sat in the canvas-covered grandstand that could accommodate five thousand, and later ten thousand, fans; others stood or sat in cars parked along the edge of the course. Automobile outings and special

⁵¹ Galveston *Daily News*, August 1, 1909, p. 16. On the rebuilding of Galveston and on the city during the Progressive era see Turner, *Women, Culture, and Community*; Patricia Bellis Bixel, “Working the Waterfront on Film: Commercial Photography and Community Studies” (Ph.D. dissertation, Rice University, 1997); and Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm: Catastrophe and Catalyst* (Austin, Tex., 2000).

⁵² Galveston *Daily News*, August 5, 1909, p. 5, and August 6, 1909, p. 1 (quotations).

⁵³ Galveston *Daily News*, August 3, 1910, p. 5 (quotations), August 4, 1910, pp. 1, 4, August 5, 1910, pp. 1, 4, August 6, 1910, pp. 1, 4, and August 7, 1910, p. 14.

trains brought visitors from far and wide to the city. In 1912 organizers sought to increase fan interest even more by halving the usual racing circuit to two and a half miles, which meant that the cars rocketed past the grandstand twice as often. Overall, the Galveston meets fulfilled to a great extent their creators' hope of establishing the city's reputation among not only racing fans but also racers from across the nation. In 1912 a Galveston journalist bragged, "The Galveston beach meet has attracted the largest entry list of any racing event held in America during 1912," including the Indianapolis 500 (the first of which had been held in 1911). Though factory-sponsored national racing teams dominated the major free-for-all events, races for cars with stock chassis gave local drivers and car owners a chance to compete. For the racing teams, rewards could be substantial. Entry fees of \$10 to \$30 in 1911 produced prize money of up to \$750 for the winners. On some occasions, motorcycle races rounded out the speed offerings as an additional attraction, and in 1913, in an unusual reversal, the automobile track was used for horse races following the events for cars. For 1913 alert auto dealers also added an exhibition of their latest models.⁵⁴

The races at Galveston reveal a combination of old and new, symptomatic of a region beginning to move toward modern integration into the national mainstream. The first cotton carnival in Galveston in 1909 included a parade of local cars driven by their owners on the day before the races began. Only the well-to-do could afford cars, and they took advantage of the parade to reinforce images of a society that placed them at the top. The carnival organizers chose an agricultural motif of green and white as thematic colors to represent cotton, and the car owners decorated their machinery accordingly, with some mixing in patriotic red, white, and blue accents. Adherence to a theme was designed to "show the visitors that there is an unanimity of spirit effort on the part of Galvestonians." One car, however, attracted particular attention from a local reporter for its marginalization of blacks, a large percentage of the supposedly united Galvestonians: "Miss Elva and

⁵⁴ *New York Times*, August 25, 1912, sec. 1, p. 3 (photo feature); *Galveston Daily News*, July 30, 1911, p. 7, July 28, 1912, p. 6, July 29, 1912, p. 8, July 30, 1912, p. 8, August 3, 1912, p. 4, August 8, 1912, p. 4 (quotation), July 25, 1913, p. 4, July 27, 1913, pp. 1, 8, July 19, 1914, p. 14, August 2, 1914, pp. 1, 6, and August 4, 1914, p. 6. The races caused a stir in the Galveston papers; extensive reports could be found almost daily in late July and early August editions between 1911 and 1914. Galveston's city engineer devised an effective way to smooth the racing surface. Two sections of railroad rail, each nine feet long and weighing around 250 pounds, were to be attached parallel to each other and pulled broadside along the beach by a team of horses. *Galveston Daily News*, July 7, 1911, p. 5.

Miss Rebecca Trueheart in their electric car showed the cotton carnival—the cotton itself—and then the little cotton pickaninny with a watering mouth holding in his hands a piece of juicy watermelon. This car represented a most unique and appropriate design and, passing through the crowds, forced on the countenances of the numerous spectators a wreathing smile and caused a continuous outburst of applause from the start to the finish of the parade.” Car owners could also secure prime seating for the races in their own automobiles along the perimeter of the course. The event was important socially, as “automobiles, polished and shining, were filled with handsome women as handsomely gowned.” The elite of this old cotton port donned new trappings as they sought to gain national acclaim in a mechanized age.⁵⁵

Fans poured into racing arenas for several major reasons. American inventors had leading roles in creating modern technology, and around the nation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, technological change often captivated public attention.⁵⁶ The South’s reaction to automotive technology was no exception to the national pattern of welcoming modernizing change with a sense of wonder. Fans sought above all to experience the thrill of the competition, described lovingly by a Galveston observer: “The noises of the crowd, the strains of band music, mingled with the exhaust reports of the racing machines, blended in a whole, the like of which quickened the pulse, warmed the hearts and flushed the faces of thousands bent upon speed—speed, and still more speed.”⁵⁷ However, the specific emotions that cars aroused for racing enthusiasts also resonated with traditional southern conceptions of honor and manliness. In New Orleans one journalist anticipated the day’s competition among “the kings of the motor world,” pleased that “[d]rivers without the knowledge of fear . . . are in the struggles” Observers even evaluated Joan Cuneo, one of the most notable of the woman racers of the time, using similar measures of courage. Homer George, the secretary of the New Orleans Automobile

⁵⁵ Galveston *Daily News*, July 30, 1909, p. 12 (first quotation), August 5, 1909, p. 3 (second quotation), August 6, 1909, p. 4 (third quotation).

⁵⁶ David E. Nye, *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology, 1880–1940* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1990); Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York, 1982), esp. chap. 2; Thomas Parke Hughes, *American Genesis: A Century of Invention and Technological Enthusiasm, 1890–1970* (New York and other cities, 1989).

⁵⁷ Galveston *Daily News*, August 4, 1910, p. 1. One day of the carnival’s races also coincided with a special theme day for American Indians at the carnival. A Galveston paper reported condescendingly that Indians had come “in hundreds to the carnival of the paleface, anxious to exchange their strings of wampum for a ticket to the big carnival tepee, or for a good seat from which to see the devil wagons speed past.” *Ibid.*

Club, rode with her during a practice run at ninety miles per hour. He marveled, "She is so nearly a typically 'cute' woman that one wonders at her nerve and ability when it comes to handling automobiles."⁵⁸

By 1909, the year the cotton carnival event began in Galveston, there could be little doubt that the South had a vital part in the life of the national sport of automobile racing. The AAA endorsed many southern events early in the year to take advantage of the favorable climate, while other regions of the country predominantly promoted events at other points in the season. At the conclusion of the 1909 season, driver Louis Chevrolet summarized the year in an article for the *New York Times*. The season began with a three-day meet in New Orleans during Mardi Gras, followed a month later by "the annual Ormond-Daytona Beach carnival." Then, "for the next few months there were numerous track meets and hill climbs throughout the country Among these were races through the South at Chattanooga, Nashville, Birmingham, and Montgomery, Ala.; Columbia, S.C., and Louisville, Ky." In October, on "an ordinary horse track" of one mile in length in Dallas, "a new 100-mile record for mile tracks" was set.⁵⁹

The highlight of the pivotal 1909 racing season as reviewed by Chevrolet was the unveiling of two facilities, only one of which was destined for lasting fame: "The year was especially notable in that it produced two new motordromes constructed for automobiles exclusively. The first of these was opened in August at Indianapolis, Ind.—a two-and-a-half-mile oval—and more recently the two-mile speedway at Atlanta, Ga., had its inaugural. The former set up numerous American records for specially banked courses, nearly all of which were subsequently broken when the Atlanta meet was held."⁶⁰ The Atlanta track, though enduring for only a brief period, ranks as one of the most significant contributions of the South to early automobile racing. The speedway that had such an auspicious start was the brainchild of Asa G. Candler Jr., son of the wealthy Coca-Cola magnate Asa Griggs Candler. The southern equivalent of wealthy northern sportsman Vanderbilt, Candler, along with businessman Edward M. Durant, conceived the idea for a race track in the early summer of 1909. They organized the Atlanta Automobile Association, becoming president and secretary respectively, and arranged for the three hundred acres of

⁵⁸ New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, February 5, 1910, p. 6 (first quotation), and February 19, 1909, p. 10 (second quotation).

⁵⁹ *New York Times*, January 2, 1910, sec. 7, p. 2.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

land and hundreds of thousands of dollars in funding needed to build a two-mile track by November. The track was situated eight miles from Atlanta, but it was accessible by road, railway, and electric streetcar. The banked track had a surface of "clay, sand and gravel, with asphalt binder," and the optimistic promoters included a grandstand with capacity for 25,000 people and bleachers that could hold 15,000 more. The contractors worked night and day, moving 750,000 cubic yards of dirt, and the track was ready by November.⁶¹

The races in November 1909 were part of Automobile Week in the Georgia city. In a promotional coup, Atlanta hosted the National Automobile Show for the presentation of the new models for 1910. Pleased that automobile producers realized that the South would be an important part of the national demand for cars, one journalist crowed, "All roads now lead to Atlanta, . . . and Atlanta will at last come into her own, so far as recognition from the motor car manufacturers of the country is concerned." Other editorialists seized upon the festivities as an opportunity to trumpet Atlanta's virtues even more loudly than usual: "It is an ideal occasion for the awakening south to analyze the community-traits that bear their most impressive harvest in the current ten days in this city." The craze extended to other areas of Georgia, as drivers conducted a series of endurance runs to Atlanta from cities across the state as part of Progressive agitation for good roads. Further, the *Atlanta Journal* and the *New York Herald* jointly sponsored a "reliability run" that would take automobilists from New York to Atlanta, an early automotive excursion into the region from the North. It generated wide publicity, promoted good roads campaigns along the entire southern portion of the route, and led the AAA the following year to include the first map of a route to the South in its popular tourist guidebook.⁶²

The races themselves lived up to their advance billing as the nation's top drivers and most powerful cars took part. Sanctioned by the AAA,

⁶¹ "Great Atlanta Two-Mile Speedway," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 7, 1909, p. B1. An article in the November 6 issue, p. 3, mentions a \$250,000 investment in the track, insured by Lloyd's of London against a rainout for the amount of \$100,000. "Interesting Facts about the Speedway," a summary of the track in the November 7 issue, p. B1, mentions a \$400,000 investment in the racing facility.

⁶² *Atlanta Constitution*, November 1, 1909, p. 1, November 3, 1909, p. 5 (first quotation), November 4, 1909, p. 5, November 5, 1909, p. 8 (second quotation), November 6, 1909, pp. 1, 3, and November 7, 1909; Preston, *Dirt Roads to Dixie*, 45, 103; Preston, "Tourism, Automobile," 1246; Preston, "Good Roads Movement," 23. See also Karsten Hülsemann, "Greenfields in the Heart of Dixie: How the American Auto Industry Discovered the South," in Philip Scranton, ed., *The Second Wave: Southern Industrialization from the 1940s to the 1970s* (Athens, Ga., and London, 2001), 219–54.

a number of stock-car events, both short and long, were on the bill, including a 200-mile run for the Coca-Cola trophy by cars with stock chassis and piston displacement of 301 to 400 cubic inches, and another 200-mile run for the City of Atlanta trophy for stock cars with displacement of 451 to 600 cubic inches. The five days of racing began well, as a world speed record fell in the first event, and racers lowered several more in succeeding days. As at some other meets, amateurs had a special race, the "Southern championship," to ensure local participation. Crowds grew larger each day, and the events attracted the elite of Atlanta society. A society column headline announced, "Society Out in Force at the Christening of Atlanta Speedway." Hundreds of important people filled the Capital City Club box in the grandstand. "Beauties in automobile bonnets . . . brought to the automobile races yesterday the inevitable social side which Atlanta gives so brilliantly to her every undertaking," while "Macon, Augusta, [and] Birmingham had sent the flowers of their social flocks to join in the sport."⁶³

The success of the races in Atlanta—the spiritual home of the New South movement's emphasis on economic development in cooperation with the North—inspired civic jealousy in both the North and the South for a brief time. Nothing could have warmed the hearts of Atlanta's leaders more than the comments of a New York automobile businessman who, following Atlanta's successful opening races, lamented, "It is a strange thing that Indianapolis, Atlanta, Ga., and Los Angeles, Cal., can build and maintain up-to-date, world-beating automobile speed tracks, while New York City, the greatest motor car centre on this continent, if not on this earth, must look to dirt horse-racing tracks for its speed tests."⁶⁴ Closer to home, Atlanta certainly sparked the envy of Birmingham. As Atlanta held another event in the spring of 1910, a Birmingham editorialist bemoaned the spending of "hundreds of Birmingham dollars" as Alabama residents headed to races held in "the only . . . rival Birmingham has in the South." The investment of "a little effort, a little time, and some money" could have meant that Birmingham would "be reaping the benefits" of a similar event.⁶⁵

⁶³ *Charlotte Observer*, November 12, 1909, p. 3 (first quotation); *Atlanta Constitution*, November 7, 1909, p. B1, November 8, 1909, November 10, 1909, p. B10 (second, third, and fourth quotations), November 11, 1909, and November 13, 1909, pp. 1–2.

⁶⁴ *New York Times*, April 10, 1910, sec. 4, p. 4. On Atlanta's importance in the New South movement see Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers*, 118–22; and Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South*, chap. 6.

⁶⁵ *Birmingham News*, April 30, 1910. Similarly, in 1909 the Fort Worth *Record* arranged a photograph promoting the race in Galveston alongside a story about the frustration of the leader of the Fort Worth Automobile Owners Association. "The clubs in Waco, Dallas, San Antonio and

Unfortunately for Atlanta, the city's racing fever cooled rather quickly after the spotlight shifted from the speedway's successful opening and the automobile show. In May 1910 the major race of a three-day meet attracted only 5,000 spectators, though another three-day meet in November 1910 may have been more successful. By 1912 the Atlanta track needed resurfacing, and the local association seemed unable to stimulate interest for reviving the speedway.⁶⁶

Racing came to the different parts of the South in ways appropriate to the cultural variations within the region, and the new sport combined its stark freshness with traditional cultural elements to ease the transition for observers and fans. The Ormond-Daytona events grew out of the presence of northern tourists, who were prominent among the early attendees. New Orleans residents encountered auto races as part of their traditional Mardi Gras celebration. In Galveston the cotton carnival, celebrating the city's economic anchor, introduced automobile racing on the local beach. In many areas, such as Nashville, Dallas, and Shreveport, car racing was part of established state or county fairs. Often, as in Montgomery and Louisville, automotive contests occurred on tracks used regularly for horse racing, a longtime staple of southern entertainment. In Atlanta, racing quite appropriately took its place as a high-dollar commercial venture led by the dominant Candler family of Coca-Cola fame. Cities such as Daytona, Savannah, Atlanta, Waco, and Galveston explicitly extolled racing's potential for civic advancement, and the sport for a time assumed a major role in publicizing a city's willingness to move in step with modern technology and social trends. The close links between racing, automobile shows, and lobbying for improved roads were natural ones in various states. Automobile associations—Progressive-style organizations peopled in the early years by business-oriented local leaders with enough wealth to own cars—often provided the impetus for both movements, and local car clubs at times scheduled group excursions, annual meetings to lobby for better roads, and other events to coincide with races. Races served simultaneously as sport, social events, and civic advertisements.⁶⁷

Houston are in a most flourishing condition," the head of the association pointed out, "and I am unable to conceive a cause for the lack of interest that prevails in Fort Worth." If only the car owners would show enthusiasm, he believed, the Fort Worth club "could in many ways find pleasure and entertainment in runs and tests of various characters and kinds." *Fort Worth Record*, June 19, 1910.

⁶⁶ *New York Times*, May 6, 1910, p. 10, May 8, 1910, sec. 4, p. 1, November 2, 1910, p. 12, November 4, 1910, p. 11, November 5, 1910, p. 8, and May 26, 1912, sec. 7, p. 13.

⁶⁷ The movement for good roads was an important part of Progressivism and the push for regional economic development. See Preston, *Dirt Roads to Dixie*; Lichtenstein, "Good Roads

In addition to the sport's civic role, individual businesses also utilized racing as a way to publicize products; corporations had a strong role in the sport even in its earliest stages. Coca-Cola was hardly alone in exploiting the advertising angle. Racing most readily served to introduce cars to a southern populace just becoming accustomed to the new machines. Though sometimes owned by wealthy private individuals, most of the major national racing teams of this period found funding from the automobile factories. In more local southern races, individual car dealers sometimes would provide an entry and either drive it personally or hire a driver. A Galveston writer summarized the commercial possibilities for manufacturers and dealers:

Not only does the automobile race bring joy to thousands of temporarily de-ranged spectators, but, viewed from the angle at which the manufacturer stands, [it] is a huge commercial enterprise of tremendous sales-producing value. Since Galveston beach race gossip began going the rounds in automobile circles several months ago, the sales departments of the automobile factories have drawn red rings around the figures [August] 8, 9 and 10 on their calendars and have been looking toward Galveston. Some of them have entered cars and some have not, but it is safe to say that a good many of them have instructed their Texas agents to be represented at the beach races; it is business that they be there, for great sales are made at automobile races. Those factories having cars entered in the beach races today, Friday and Saturday will await the result of their races with keen interest. If their car wins the race the money expended in financing the entry will expand a hundredfold through advertising channels.

Car dealers of the winning make and model often drew overtly from recent racing action in their advertisements. For example, P. R. Flanigan Auto Company in Memphis proclaimed, "Studebaker wins first and third in 100 mile race July 4th, without a stop, defeating Marmon, American, Speedwell, Velie, Buick, Ford, 2 Chalmers and others. The winning car is a stock model, owned privately and has been in daily use for over two years."⁶⁸

Sellers of cars were certainly not the only business owners who used racing as a marketing tool. Another effective relationship developed between race promoters and the makers of automobile parts. At the Savannah meet in 1911, for instance, manufacturers of tire rims, spark

and Chain Gangs," 86-90; and George Brown Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge, 1967), 254-58.

⁶⁸ Galveston *Daily News*, August 8, 1912, p. 6; Memphis *Commercial Appeal*, July 6, 1913, p. 16. See also the advertisements for Buick cars and N.S.U. motorcycles in the New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, February 22, 1909, p. 10, and the Buick advertisement in the *Daily Picayune*, February 26, 1911, p. 14, for other good examples.

plugs, and magnetos offered special prizes.⁶⁹ Although at the time the cars themselves did not usually have corporate logos painted on them, some grandstand areas did have advertising banners on prominent display. Advertising that featured racing themes also extended beyond the sport's natural ties with cars to products linked more tenuously to the actual events. The Kress store in Atlanta held a "Grand Auto-Week Sale," and M. Rich & Brothers Company announced, "Atlanta's Largest Department Store Welcome[s] Visitors to the Great Auto Events." Sakowitz Brothers department store in Galveston drew attention to its newspaper ad with the words "The Carnival" and "The Races," followed by "You'll Need Clothes." The advertisement explained, "If you are an automobile owner or driver, this store has things especially designed for your wear. Or, if like the most of us you are a mere spectator, you'll find our clothes will help you enjoy the spectacle." It was as spectacle—passive commercial entertainment—that the races functioned best, and alert business owners worked to nurture the embryonic culture of consumption underway in American cities.⁷⁰

By the early twentieth century in the South, machines, cities, and large-scale industry had attained moderate importance in reality and immense importance in rhetoric. As C. Vann Woodward noted, southerners had already begun, though often using the salve of romanticism, to recant their antebellum views of society and to support those modern, northern heresies. Southern economic development depended greatly on northern capital, and the New South boosters looked northward for legitimation. Promoters of racing events took great pride in the national respect accorded their successful contests, and they unhesitatingly welcomed racers from across America and Europe. Cars and roads, like factories, electric lights, and railroads before them, became great symbols of progress, and unlike trains, cars could be easily raced. The races enabled observers to experience vicariously a new level of competition and speed within a southern culture whose isolation had traditionally limited entertainment to the local level. In the 1920s the construction of football stadiums similarly allowed boosters "to showcase the progressive urban society of the twentieth-century South" for the benefit of northern pundits (and investors) and to take part in the ongoing national transition toward commercialized

⁶⁹ *New York Times*, November 26, 1911, sec. 4, p. 8.

⁷⁰ Quattlebaum, *Great Savannah Races*, 115; *Atlanta Constitution*, November 5, 1909, p. 4 (Rich & Brothers ad), and November 7, 1909, p. 2 (Kress ad); *Galveston Daily News*, August 2, 1911, p. 12 (Sakowitz Brothers ad).

entertainment for spectators. The creation and promotion of race courses and events served the same purposes but at an early, crucial stage of those changes in the region.⁷¹

By World War I, the nationwide prominence of automobile racing in the South had dwindled considerably for several reasons. Southern boosters had proven that their cities could host important sporting events as well as any city in the country, and after the initial burst of national publicity, the sport produced diminishing returns for their substantial investments of time and money. Further, wonderful new tracks, including the earliest tracks made of boards, in the Midwest and on the West Coast challenged southern efforts. Racing in the South also declined because it had grown in part as a thrill, like other eye-catching demonstrations of technological breakthroughs, associated with fairs and carnivals. Once the wonder wore away and automobiles became a normal sight, some of the attraction for spectators disappeared. Airplane demonstrations became a new and more interesting spectacle for some. Promoters of road races suffered public opposition from ordinary car owners. The natural advantages of southern beaches disappeared as specially built tracks emerged elsewhere. Circular tracks could also be made more secure for spectators, removing the initial advantage southerners held due to their willingness to use troops for security on road courses. Finally, the onset of World War I seems to have hurt even the most resilient of southern race promoters. Racing of local importance certainly did not cease, but major events faded for a time.

The South's involvement in nationally significant automobile racing following the war took a different form—on board tracks—but the sport remained much the same in all other significant aspects. The first important use of lumber for building automobile tracks took place near Los Angeles in 1910, and by the early 1920s these unique structures occupied an extremely prominent position in racing across the nation.

⁷¹ Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, chaps. 5 and 6, esp. p. 158; Doyle, "Turning the Tide," 46–47 (quotation on p. 46). On the vital role of the railroad for the previous generation in the South see Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, chap. 1. For the two-edged symbolic importance of trains and other machines for America as a whole see Trachtenberg, *Incorporation of America*, chap. 2. Like cars in speed contests, trains could arouse a visceral fascination regarding the extreme limits of new technology. In 1896 a railroad passenger agent convinced his employer to sponsor a great crash of two locomotives. Forty thousand people gathered near Waco, Texas, on September 15, 1896, to see the spectacle. Allen Lee Hamilton, "Crash at Crush," in Ron Tyler et al., eds., *The New Handbook of Texas* (6 vols.; Austin, Tex., 1996), II, 393–94. One enterprising organizer of the Southern Interstate Fair in Atlanta made plans in 1903 for a 100-mile race along the Southern Railway line between a train and an automobile. *Horseless Age*, September 23, 1903.

The South had three such tracks. The Baltimore-Washington Speedway at Laurel, Maryland—on which NASCAR founder Bill France discovered the appeal of speed—operated from 1925 to 1926 before bad weather and bad management doomed it to be broken up and sold for lumber. With slightly more success, the builder of the Indianapolis race track constructed an innovative board track near Miami, Florida, that had turns banked at fifty degrees, but it was destroyed by a hurricane in September 1926 after only one record-breaking event. The lumber that could be salvaged went to help rebuild storm-damaged Miami. Only a track on Route 26 in Pineville, North Carolina, near Charlotte, managed a more enduring presence.⁷² A new generation of racers fought for victory on these boards, men such as Tommy Milton, Earl Cooper, Earl Devore, Benny Hill, and Harry Hartz. Well-known racer and New Jersey native Peter De Paolo described the experience of racing on board tracks: “Going into those steep-banked turns, it looked from the cockpit as though you were going smack into a high board fence at 140 miles per hour.” De Paolo, who would help lead the Ford automobile company’s involvement in NASCAR in the 1950s, welcomed the opportunity to compete at these tracks because he “had always wanted to visit the South . . . and enjoy that Southern hospitality!”⁷³

From 1924 until 1927 the Charlotte board track was the ultimate in automobile racing in the South. The most impressive racing accomplishment in the region since the construction of the track in Atlanta in 1909, the Charlotte facility hosted seven major race events between October 1924 and September 1927, including three of the twelve chief dates on the AAA schedule in 1926. The track began with a visit to Charlotte in 1924 by Jack Prince, a former bicycle racer and the primary designer and builder of board tracks across the nation. A group of businessmen—including car dealers Osmond L. Barringer and C. Lane Etheredge and banker B. D. Heath—seized upon the idea of a track for the Carolinas. The group formed a corporation, issued \$230,000 in stock and \$150,000 in bonds, and took governing roles in

⁷² Dick Wallen, *Board Track: Guts, Gold and Glory* (Nokomis, Fla., 1990), 48–60, 155–73, 300–306, 335–44, 363–67. For a lively biography of the man who, among many other ventures, helped lead the development of the tracks at Miami and Indianapolis see Mark S. Foster, *Castles in the Sand: The Life and Times of Carl Graham Fisher* (Gainesville, Fla., and other cities, 2000).

⁷³ Peter De Paolo, *Wall Smacker: The Saga of the Speedway* (Cleveland, Ohio, and Pittsburgh, Pa., 1935), 261 (first quotation), 148 (second quotation). For De Paolo’s perspective on the various races at the three southern tracks see pp. 148–51, 157–58, 180–82, 186–87, 189–94, 196, 202–3, and 237. On his NASCAR involvement see Golenbock, *Last Lap*, 33–35 and 116–17; and Golenbock, *American Zoom*, 23.

preparing a speedway for an inaugural event in October. Prince's construction company built the spectacular oval, one and a quarter miles long, with turns banked at forty degrees. Barringer assumed the post of general manager for the speedway, and he quickly aroused the enthusiasm of the city, concrete evidence for which was the real estate boom for land surrounding the track and the rapid sale of stopwatches at local jewelry stores. Around race days, even barber shops experienced extra traffic, as race attendees sought to look their best.⁷⁴

No one cut corners in presenting Charlotte and the track in the most favorable way at the first race; the sophistication of marketers had clearly increased since the earliest days of racing in the South. Crowds of thousands viewed practice runs in the days leading up to the 200-lap, 250-mile debut. A track manager visiting from the North acknowledged the track's beauty and efficiency: "There is no question . . . but that the Charlotte speedway is away ahead of anything else in the country." For the opening race an orderly crowd reportedly totaling 30,000 watched a field of eleven drivers make the Charlotte track the world's fastest.⁷⁵ As was the case in major events before World War I, the races garnered the support of Charlotte residents from a wide variety of backgrounds, including the most elite civic, commercial, and social leaders. The races and concomitant activities became significant social events. For example, one group of fashionable young women hosted a dance for the drivers in May 1925, while famous evangelist Billy Sunday made plans to attend the race that same week. At the race, "women in brilliant hued sport clothes and men in light clothes gave to the occasion a society touch."⁷⁶

During the first event and subsequent contests, marketing efforts associated with races reached new heights. A wide array of businesses took advantage of the races to advertise products ranging from cars and

⁷⁴ Wallen, *Board Track*, 300–306; Robert E. Ireland, *Entering the Auto Age: The Early Automobile in North Carolina, 1900–1930* (Raleigh, N.C., 1990), 49–50; LeGette Blythe and Charles Raven Brockmann, *Hornets' Nest: The Story of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County* (Charlotte, N.C., 1961), 263, 300–301, 305, and 436; *Charlotte Observer*, October 21, 1924, p. 14, October 23, 1924, pp. 1, 3, 10, 14, October 24, 1924, pp. 1, 4, 5, 7, 14, October 25, 1924, pp. 1, 13, October 26, 1924, pp. A1, A3, A4, October 27, 1924, pp. 1, 7, 11, May 10, 1925, p. B2, and January 9, 1927, sec. 3, p. 10. A feature on the original track can be found in the *Charlotte Observer*, May 23, 1992, pp. A1, A6. Also see Greg Fielden, *Charlotte Motor Speedway* (Osceola, Wisc., 2000), 15.

⁷⁵ *Charlotte Observer*, October 20, 1924, pp. 5, 9, October 21, 1924, pp. 4, 10, 14, October 22, 1924, pp. 1, 14, 17, October 23, 1924, pp. 1, 3, 10, 14, October 24, 1924, pp. 1, 5, 7, 14 (quotation), October 25, 1924, pp. 1, 13, October 26, 1924, pp. A1, A3, A4, October 27, 1924, pp. 1, 7, 11, and October 28, 1924, p. 1. Initial reports estimated attendance at 40,000, but later estimates consistently indicated around 30,000. *Charlotte Observer*, May 10, 1925, p. B2.

⁷⁶ *Charlotte Observer*, May 6, 1924, pp. 6, 12, and May 12, 1925, p. 12 (quotation).

car parts to clothes such as “coats, dresses and ensembles for speedway wear” and “brilliant furs for cold grandstands.”⁷⁷ More innovative was Barringer’s plan to enhance the appeal of the track itself by importing a wild buffalo from Yellowstone National Park. Named Barney Oldfield in honor of the colorful early racing driver, the beast provided entertainment for visitors when penned nearby on race day, and at other times he had freedom to roam the infield area. As an official mascot, however, he proved obstinate and occasionally dangerous, leading Barringer personally to shoot Barney. Buffalo soon thereafter appeared briefly among the offerings at several Charlotte restaurants.⁷⁸ Less sanguinary but equally innovative was the live broadcast of a race in November 1925 to a wide audience over WBT, the city’s famous AM radio station.⁷⁹ Further, driver Peter De Paolo was chosen in May 1925 to address a gathering of Boy Scouts in Charlotte on the topic “Keeping Fit for Life’s Race,” and he relished the duty of being a good role model and publicist for racing, signing autographs only for those youngsters who promised neither to smoke nor to drink alcohol before reaching age twenty-one.⁸⁰ Editorialists penned tributes to the widespread publicity that the race track brought to the city. One lauded, “The very fact that Charlotte is the first and only city in the South thus far to build a modern board speedway and stage races with world-famous drivers participating has given the city a large amount of prestige because of the enterprise and progressiveness that is known to be necessary for such an accomplishment.”⁸¹

After the initial burst of popularity and publicity, as in other cities, racing reigned profitably for only a relatively brief period, enduring four seasons in the Queen City. Grandstand seats priced as high as \$5

⁷⁷ *Charlotte Observer*, October 25, 1924, p. 7.

⁷⁸ *Charlotte Observer*, November 4, 1925, p. 11, November 7, 1925, p. 6, November 13, 1925, p. 18, May 2, 1926, sec. 1, p. 4, and May 7, 1926, p. 4. Underscoring the close connection between city and country in the South, animals also appeared at the track in the spring of 1926 in the form of a herd of sheep, allowed to graze on the grounds to keep the grass trimmed. *Charlotte Observer*, May 1, 1926, p. 5. For the close links between city and country throughout southern history see Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers*.

⁷⁹ *Charlotte Observer*, November 4, 1925, p. 1, November 6, 1925, p. 1, and November 12, 1925, p. 13. For more on the importance of WBT see Pamela Grundy, “From *Il Trovatore* to the Crazy Mountaineers: The Rise and Fall of Elevated Culture on WBT-Charlotte, 1922–1930,” *Southern Cultures*, 1 (Fall 1994), 51–73; and Grundy, “‘We Always Tried to Be Good People’: Respectability, Crazy Water Crystals, and Hillbilly Music on the Air, 1933–1935,” *Journal of American History*, 81 (March 1995), 1591–620.

⁸⁰ De Paolo, *Wall Smacker*, 158.

⁸¹ *Charlotte Observer*, November 10, 1925, p. 8. Laurel, Maryland, and Miami soon had tracks. The cities of Houston and Galveston made plans to have Prince construct a speedway between them in 1925, but apparently the track was not built. *Charlotte Observer*, November 9, 1925, p. 4.

in 1925 did not deter crowds, and apparently the speedway set aside a separate section for black fans as well. In May 1925 the speedway announced its highest attendance, 55,000, for a successful Memorial Day event, and in November of that year, a 250-miler on Armistice Day drew 30,000 to 35,000 fans to the track. For Memorial Day in 1926, speedway managers again estimated the crowd at 30,000 to 35,000, but reportedly “the race was a rather dull and colorless affair,” with no new speed records set. Because “the long 250 mile race [was] beginning to pall on many fans,” race managers changed to a format of several shorter sprint races for meets in August and November 1926. Attendance dropped to about 22,000 in August, despite the new events and the crowning of a speedway beauty queen, and on a wintry day in November it fell further to about 7,500. The speedway manager blamed “thirteen cent cotton and cold weather rather than lack of interest,” but nonetheless the speedway filed for bankruptcy protection in January 1927.⁸²

The track remained active for only one more season. Long involved with the direction of the facility, B. D. Heath and two car dealers, C. C. Coddington and Lee A. Folger, bought the track at auction and reorganized it as the Carolinas Speedway Inc. With the help of veteran AAA official Fred Wagner, they promoted a race meet for September 1927 that would prove to be the track’s last. Workers used at least eighteen carloads of two-by-fours to repair and strengthen the structure in preparation for the program of three sprint races, a ten-mile race for amateurs, and a seventy-five-mile race for stock cars. With somewhat of an air of desperation, the owners publicized the races as “the greatest sporting event in Southern history.” Foreshadowing Charlotte’s later role as the center of NASCAR, advertisements emphasized the appeal of the stock-car race in particular—“Will the Car Like You Drive Win Over the Kind Driven by Your Friend?”—and journalists speculated that the profitability of the races would “answer the question of whether or not racing will continue to be a southern sport.”⁸³ The *Charlotte Observer* fervently thanked the new proprietors for rescuing the track from “the brink of financial disaster” and labeled it “an asset to the community” and “a community enterprise.” However, failure loomed.

⁸² *Charlotte Observer*, May 3, 1925, pp. A1, A3, A10, May 8, 1925, p. 3, May 12, 1925, p. 1, November 12, 1925, p. 1, May 11, 1926, pp. 1, 7 (second quotation), 12, 15 (first quotation), August 24, 1926, p. 1, November 12, 1926, p. 1, November 13, 1926, p. 2 (third quotation), and January 7, 1927, p. 3.

⁸³ *Charlotte Observer*, September 8, 1927, p. 12 (first quotation), September 11, 1927, sec. 1, p. 6 (second quotation), and September 18, 1927, sec. 1, pp. 1, 10 (third quotation).

Despite a crowd initially reported to total 22,000 for the sprint races and a good showing for the rain-delayed running of the stock-car contest, loose and splintering boards marred the races, injuring drivers as well as tires. Though fans remained interested, the anticipated cost of repairing the decaying track proved prohibitive for the new owners (who had bought the track in part as an investment in the underlying real estate), and the first era of nationally significant racing in Charlotte ended. In 1959, as construction crews built the new Charlotte Motor Speedway, now one of NASCAR's most important venues, the new track's designer, John Lippard, escorted an aging Osmond Barringer to view the facility. As a child Lippard had attended the final race at the original track a few miles south. The moment linked two major eras of automobile racing in the South.⁸⁴

While this article is by no means a comprehensive study, it represents a first step toward giving automobile racing in the South its rightful place in the history of sport, regional interaction, urban growth, and civic promotion in the New South, and mass marketing strategies within America's consumer culture. Uncovering the real origins of automobile racing in the South illuminates several important aspects of the region's history. Even though a conservative, rural, and agricultural society dominated the region before World War II, urban, progressive elements shaped the early years of southern automobile racing. The birth of a southern sanctioning body in the 1940s—NASCAR—did not represent the South's first organized embrace of automotive contests. The durability of the myth of stock-car racing's origin among rural outlaws simply underscores the need for students of southern history to strive constantly to separate fact from myth. Seen in the full perspective of its century-long history, automobile racing follows the pattern of other important cultural phenomena—a simultaneous process of creating and reflecting broader trends.

The growth of modern sport in America first depended on the urbanization and industrialization of the late nineteenth century to provide new technology, dense population centers, and drives for moral reform that elevated athletic activity to a positive good. Both

⁸⁴ Charlotte *Observer*, September 18, 1927, sec. 1, p. 10, September 19, 1927, p. 8 (quotations), September 20, 1927, pp. 1, 12, 13, and September 21, 1927, pp. 1, 9; Wallen, *Board Track*, 306. On Lippard in 1959, see Charlotte *Observer*, May 23, 1992, p. A6. Maintaining the board surface had always been a challenge. To clear the track before the second race, six men, tied together to brace themselves on the sharp banking and barefooted to avoid slipping, spent three days using brooms to remove debris. Charlotte *Observer*, May 3, 1925, p. A1. Flying boards were not the only odd way to be hurt at the track. In 1926 a racer sustained an eye injury when he encountered a flying bird that smashed his goggles. Charlotte *Observer*, May 8, 1926, p. 1.

participatory and spectator sports boomed by the early twentieth century. Spectator sports such as automobile racing were integral to the growth of a popular culture that included movies, vaudeville, and other forms of mass entertainment. In northern cities in the first three decades of the twentieth century, new forms of community ritual such as attending motion pictures and baseball games or going to nightclubs eventually (through not completely or immediately) helped to break down ethnic and sometimes class or racial barriers and draw together disparate groups via a common experience and language. Automobile racing served a comparable function to some extent in the South, as both elite and poor, black and white, followed the developments in their cities and celebrated the new technology. That elite guidance and corporate pursuits characterized racing's culture seemed natural during a time distinguished by what one writer has termed "the incorporation of America." Racing's particularly strong following also reflects the trends described by T. J. Jackson Lears. In cities across the nation, Lears argues, "the transition to secular and corporate modes of modern culture" resulted in a sense of "personal disquiet" for many people. They attempted to fill the spiritual vacuum by embarking on "quests for intense experience." Watching and participating in car races was one of many paths by which urban southerners sought such fulfillment.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ For an introduction to the history of American sport see Steven A. Riess, *Sport in Industrial America, 1850–1920* (Wheeling, Ill., 1995). Riess's excellent bibliographical essay is a good starting point to enter a voluminous literature (pp. 178–206). On broad cultural trends see Trachtenberg, *Incorporation of America*; and T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (New York, 1981; reprint, Chicago and London, 1994), chap. 1 (quotations on p. 58). On northern development of mass culture and its effect of bringing together disparate groups see, for example, Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870–1920* (Cambridge, Eng., and other cities, 1983), esp. chap. 8; Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939* (Cambridge, Eng., and other cities, 1990), chap. 3; and Lewis A. Erenberg, *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890–1930* (Westport, Conn., and London, 1981).