

Automobile races at the fair in Abilene, Kansas.

Spectacles of Speed: Modernity, Masculinity, and Auto Racing in Kansas, 1909–1918

by Steve Marston

They call it a craze, but it isn't. To talk plain about this speed business, it is a disease. Furthermore, it is a contagious disease, and every guy who is affected with it should be placarded with quarantine signs.

Wichita Eagle, July 6, 1916

A reporter for the *Eagle* had just experienced an automobile ride with George Clark, the “dare-devil driver,” as he tore around a half-mile dirt track in Wichita, Kansas. Opening with the above paragraph, the writer went on to reveal both the fear and excitement elicited by new levels of velocity, which eclipsed even the speed afforded by most motor vehicles of that era. He also described Clark, whose “eyes were shining a glassy glare as he bent far over the left-hand side to make the turn. . . . on the stretch he laughed so loud at me that I could hear him above the ear-busting rumble of the engine.”¹ Such an account connected the perils of the modern machine with the driver as its master, a man who is courageous (and perhaps senseless) enough to push the limits of such technology. The writer predicted that this risky behavior would prove to be a “contagious disease,” and in referring to “every guy” who catches it, he firmly gendered the practice as masculine.

Steve Marston is a PhD candidate in the Department of American Studies at the University of Kansas, having completed an MA in American Studies at the University of Alabama in 2011. While his research generally entails the cultural study of sport, his dissertation project uses ethnographic and historical methods to address dirt-track auto racing as a widespread and significant cultural practice in Kansas.

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1. “Racing is Disease: Reporter Who Clipped the Circle With George Clark Tells His News of the Speed Mania,” *Wichita Eagle*, July 6, 1916. No author name was given for this story, which is true for all Kansas newspaper accounts cited within this article.



THE LAST CALL FOR THE MOTOR RACES
AN ALL STAR CAST
 will be the program with Glenn Breed Fast Buick Bear Cat Racer, The National Champion,
 Wilson Special, Mercer and
 Least but not Last, the Little Ford Red Devil as Stellar Attractions, along with others.
 Daring and Nerve Thrilling---Yes It Will Be The Big Day
THURSDAY, MAY 13TH
WINFIELD FAIR SPEEDWAY Races Start At 2:30.
 Admission 50 Cents.

Early racecars lacked safety features such as seatbelts, and drivers were exposed to outside conditions. The distortion in the drawing lends an additional sense of forward motion.

However, residents of Kansas had not been so eager to accept the changes associated with early twentieth-century progress and speed. Acceleration was hindered by a gradualist approach to public projects, especially road improvement, as farmers were wary of potentially high costs. The state did not form a highway commission until 1917, and it was far behind others in creating state financial aid for road construction, as documented by historian Paul Sutter. Such resistance might have contributed to outsiders portraying turn-of-the-century Kansas as a dismal place; this is illustrated, for example, by the rural gloom in the 1900 novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*.²

2. Paul Sutter, "Paved With Good Intentions: Good Roads, the Automobile, and the Rhetoric of Rural Improvement in the Kansas Farmer, 1890-1914," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 18 (Winter 1995-1996): 288; State Highway Commission of Kansas, *First Biennial Report of the Kansas Highway Commission* (Topeka: Kansas State Printing Plant, 1919), 14; Craig Miner, *Kansas: The History of the Sunflower State, 1854-2000* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 193-94.

In response, Progressive figures in the state advocated for an embrace of modernizing practices in the early twentieth century, appealing to scientific notions of "efficiency" and "practical" solutions to social problems. Within the wave of new legislation on issues from utilities to art, public officials promoted road improvement by arguing that farmers financially benefited from more effective transportation of goods, thus addressing their concerns about cost. In the following decades, support for the "good roads" movement grew, and Kansans bought automobiles in large numbers as prices dropped: by 1920, the state ranked eleventh in terms of automobile ownership per capita. The purchasing spree peaked around the mid-1910s, leading the Kansas bank commissioner to comment that "the craze is getting to the point where men are buying cars and going without overcoats."³ The rise of the auto-

mobile manufacturing industry in the 1910s, which included plants in Wichita, Topeka, Hutchinson, and other towns, further encouraged purchasing. In light of such developments, which were accompanied by the emergence of the aviation industry, public commentators frequently celebrated the state's progress, leading cultural geographer James R. Shortridge to refer to the early twentieth century as the "Golden Age" of Kansas, particularly in terms of self-image.⁴

In conjunction, state and county fairs reflected such optimism. The fairs acted as idealized public versions of community life, and after a decades-long hiatus (due to financial troubles among other factors), in the 1910s the Kansas State Fair emerged

3. *Newton Kansan*, November 23, 1914, as quoted in Miner, *Kansas*, 263; see also Miner, *Kansas*, 202-4; Sutter, "Paved With Good Intentions," 285, 292, 295.

4. James R. Shortridge, "Regional Image and Sense of Place in Kansas," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 28 (Autumn 2005): 206-8; Miner, *Kansas*, 191.

as a festival of food, politics and a variety of racing events.⁵ Previously, such competitions were limited to horses and bicycles; however, during the century's second decade, automobile racing grew in popularity at Kansas fairs, occasionally representing the largest draw of the week. In some towns, auto races were staged during Fourth of July celebrations as well; as a whole, at least a half-dozen tracks in the state hosted races during the 1910s. Despite the growth of wooden board tracks in cities around the country, Kansas racing largely took place on dirt ovals, in part due to the frequent adoption of horse tracks for automobile contests.⁶

These new racing events, featuring unforeseen levels of speed and sound, drew onlookers with their promise of spectacular action. Theorizing this element of modern life, historical anthropologist John MacAloon argued that the "spectacle" tends to primarily appeal to the visual sense, particularly in scale and intensity; it also requires both actors and audience, who in tandem create a "metagenre" of performance, with the spectacle generating assorted meanings for viewers. Theater scholar Amy Hughes added that the "spectacle" is defined in relation to its cultural context, in that it exceeds the viewer's notion of ordinary scale: "Our sense of the spectacular springs from the cultural norms that are jarred, destabilized, and exceeded in the process of representation."⁷ In the early twentieth century, Americans widely experienced spectacular events that historian David Nye termed "the technological sublime"—exhibits of unforeseen power and scale produced by newly created machinery, such as railroads, electricity, and skyscraper buildings. According to Nye, in a country

that had become increasingly secular and pluralistic in the nineteenth century, the "technological sublime" provided twentieth-century Americans with opportunities to collectively share awe in the face of transcendent moments.⁸

Automobile races certainly represented a spectacular version of the "technological sublime," and in Kansas, local newspaper coverage generated and echoed the awe shared by viewers. Thus these races, as contextualized within larger community festivals, represent a valuable space in which to explore practices and discourses of modern progress at the local level, which served as a counternarrative to portrayals of the state as antimodern. Spectators directly faced both the promise and peril offered by the new machines, and local newspapers concretized such phenomena into narratives. Furthermore, reflective of the larger merging of such technology and masculinity, automobile racing was clearly a male-gendered site: not only were most professional racers men, but the practice itself reflected the "rugged" masculinity that gained visibility around the turn of the century, in this case performed through competition and technological mastery. This article approaches auto racing as spectacle from 1909 to 1918, with two primary arguments.⁹ First, event promoters and newspaper writers and editors worked in tandem to present auto races, and the festivals within which they were staged, as spectacles of progress and exceptionalism. Second, this narrative framed automobile racers as masculine exemplars of such progress and exceptionalism, mirroring the national-level gendering of technological mastery as male.

Local newspapers provide the vast majority of insight into the formulation of festivals and races as public spectacle. Specifically, five locations in Kansas will be examined: Concordia, Belleville, Winfield, Wichita, and finally Hutchinson, the location of the State Fair. Kansas historian Craig Miner contended that around the turn of the century, a "sterling class"

5. Thomas Cleary Percy, "A History of the Kansas State Fair, 1863–2006" (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 2006).

6. Allen E. Brown, *The History of America's Speedways Past and Present* (Comstock, Mich.: Allen E. Brown, 2003), 317–30. The ubiquity of dirt-oval tracks in Kansas is evident in the deep photograph archives of the Bob Lawrence Kansas Racing History website: <http://www.winfield.50megs.com/>. Kansas City, Missouri, was home to a board track, the Kansas City Speedway, from 1922 to 1924, though it hosted only four races. "The Greatest Display of Skill, Nerve, and Daring," Kansas City Public Library website, <http://www.kclibrary.org/blog/week-kansas-city-history/greatest-display-skill-nerve-and-daring>.

7. Amy E. Hughes, *Spectacles of Reform: Theater and Activism in Nineteenth-Century America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 14; John J. MacAloon, "Olympic Games and the Theory of Spectacle in Modern Societies," in *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals Toward a Theory of Cultural Performance*, ed. John J. MacAloon (Philadelphia, Pa.: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1984), 243–44, 246, 250.

8. David E. Nye, *American Technological Sublime* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994), xiii, xiii–xiv.

9. In the course of research for this article, the earliest found newspaper coverage of a Kansas race was in 1909, thus the choice of this year as front end of the studied period. I chose 1918 as the ending year in conjunction with the end of World War I, a major event in shaping U.S. culture; furthermore, a handful of new race tracks opened in 1919, implying an expansion of auto racing following the war. See Brown, *The History of America's Speedways Past and Present*.

of newspaper editors emerged as major figures in Kansas, some of whom were better known than the prominent politicians of the state. In general, these editors were determined to project a positive image of Kansas, which helped fuel the era of Progressive optimism until World War I.¹⁰ The writers for such newspapers experienced local phenomena more intimately than the national media and were more invested in promoting festivals as part of a town's social and economic health, thus generating the enthusiasm so prominent in their accounts.

In order to situate this coverage in national context, an assessment of broad dynamics of masculinity and technological progress will precede close analysis of Kansas newspaper texts. Around the turn of the twentieth century, several large-scale, transformative trends marked American social life. These included the mass movement of people (both native-born and foreign-born migrants) to cities, the transition from an agricultural to an industrial economy, rapid technological innovation, and increased concentration of capital in the hands of a small group of elites. Masculinity scholar Michael Kimmel argued that, for men of this era, modern change "created a new sense of an oppressively crowded, depersonalized, and often emasculated life." In addition to the decline of self-employment and the replacement of human labor with machines, public figures expressed anxiety over the "feminizing" influences of modernity, which included the bureaucratic nature of cities, maternal care of boys, and the first-wave feminist political movement. In each case, the notion of the "self-made man" seemed under threat.¹¹ In response, American men increasingly displayed their masculinity as performance. As documented by Gail Bederman in *Manliness and Civilization*, dominant codes of manliness, which had previously been based on civilized self-restraint, increasingly included one's wild, untamed, and sometimes-violent instincts as well. Displays of such masculinity abounded, as evidenced by the rise of male-

hero fiction, male-only social groups, and "muscular Christianity," through which religious leaders promoted bodily exercise for men as a spiritually charged activity.¹²

Automobile racing was also a prominent site at which masculinity was performed, as expected by its overlap with two male-gendered spheres: sports and technology. Particularly among urban Americans, sports emerged as a realm in which participants could perform rugged, competitive masculinity for the approval of others. The growth of leisure time had made possible an entire "culture of amusements," and sports became a prominent component of this culture. As sources of conservative (self-made) manhood were scarce at work or home, Kimmel contended, masculinity "could be vicariously enjoyed by appropriating the symbols and props that signified earlier forms of power and excitement." In turn, interest in football, golf, tennis, boxing, and other sports exploded in popularity, while men also took to the gym to hone their bodies.¹³

Mirroring this emphasis on mastery of the body, masculinity was additionally linked to mastery of machines. Technological innovation was quickening the pace of American life, and historian Ruth Oldenziel argued that a specific process led to the construction of "technology" as masculine by the end of World War I. In particular, engineers successfully laid claim to expertise over the rapidly evolving machines of that period, and these technicians, predominantly white men, "staked their claims on key aspects of industrial capitalism, to the exclusion of women, African-Americans, and workers." Oldenziel went on to illustrate the changing meaning of "technology" as a social construct, from an earlier equation with general production (thus quilting was considered "technology") to specific association with "a self-contained, self-generative, and machine-bound object devoid of human agency."¹⁴

10. Miner, *Kansas*, 200–201. These race locations were chosen based on their consistent hosting of auto racing events during the 1909–1918 period, as discerned from online archival materials and Brown's *The History of America's Speedways Past and Present*. The towns range from more rural to urban; however, this article will not address rurality/urbanity as a factor in the role of racing spectacles in each town. Instead, it will focus on trends that apply across locations, though the State Fair in Hutchinson, as the most prominent of these fairs, receives the plurality of attention.

11. Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 58, 82–83.

12. Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 29; Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 87, 95–104, 111–15, 116–20; Justine Greve, "Jesus Didn't Tap: Masculinity, Theology, and Ideology in Christian Mixed Martial Arts," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 24 (Summer 2014): 146–50.

13. Varda Burstyn, *The Rites of Men: Manhood, Politics, and the Culture of Sport* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 105; Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 80–81, 92–93.

14. Ruth Oldenziel, *Making Technology Masculine: Men, Women, and Modern Machines in America, 1870–1945* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999), 12–19, 23, 42, 182.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, a large number of Americans gained access to one of these new machines: the automobile. While steam-, electric- and gasoline-powered cars, known as “horseless carriages,” were all built in the nineteenth century, it was not until the arrival of the Ford Model N in 1906, followed by the improved Model T in 1908, that the automobile became a mass-consumed product. By 1907 American auto manufacturers had passed their European counterparts, and a half-million cars were registered in the U.S.; according to historian James Flink, this made America “the world’s foremost automobile culture. Nowhere else did a mass market for cars materialize so early.”¹⁵

Given the concurrent rise of sporting culture and driving culture, it is little surprise that automobile racing rose in prominence during this period. The first major U.S. race, a November 1895 contest in Chicago, was staged at a time when bicycles were widely considered the future of transportation, and automobiles merely a passing fad. The race itself reflected the infancy of the industry: the winner averaged eight miles per hour, and malfunctions occasionally forced drivers to forge their own parts. Over the following decade and a half, road races garnered significant publicity in the U.S. The Vanderbilt Cup, run in Long Island from 1904 to 1910, was ostensibly staged in response to the fact that early American automobiles lagged behind European models. In his words, family fortune heir and race host William Vanderbilt “felt the United States was far behind other nations in the automotive industry, and I wanted the country to catch up. I wanted to bring foreign drivers and their cars over here in the hope that Americans would wake up.” In 1908 five Europeans and one American competed in the New York-to-Paris endurance run, spending nearly six months driving across the U.S., Russia, and Europe; the American Thomas Flyer emerged victorious, returning to Times Square in triumph in August. For the most part, American auto racing remained concentrated in the Northeast, though it did spread beyond the region. For example, historian Randal Hall demonstrated that despite the mythology of Southern racing’s bootlegging roots, organized races were held in a half-dozen Southern cities as early as 1903. Hall

argued that the early success of racing events was tied to a larger, national fascination with new technologies, and “the South’s reaction to automotive technology was no exception to the national pattern of welcoming modernizing change with a sense of wonder.”¹⁶

During this period, the *Kansas City Star* hosted its own endurance races, including a 1909 event that drew dozens of drivers to hit the dirt roads of Kansas and Nebraska over a period of five days. Departing from Kansas City, contestants headed west to Junction City, north to Lincoln and Omaha, and finally south through St. Joseph on their way back to the *Star*’s headquarters.¹⁷ This race, facilitated by (and publicizing) the “good roads” movement of the era, reflected the larger turn in Kansas toward modernization at the opening of the twentieth century. Major festivals, especially county and state fairs, reflected elements of such modernity, and racing programs exemplified the increased pace of life. Automobile races, emerging as one of the top draws of the fair, fused dynamics of technological progress and competitive sports, both gendered as masculine, on a single stage.

In turn, local newspapers enthusiastically documented these fairs, highlighting the “motor contests” as they grew in popularity. On September 2, 1914, the front page of the *Concordia Daily Blade* blared the headline, “A Great Opening: Greatest Automobile Showing in Kansas: Estimated over 1000 Cars Were On Grounds.” In the account that followed, the *Blade* asserted that “the first day of the Cloud county fair was really the biggest first day event in the history of the association,” and though the races were not closely contested, “the great line up of automobiles was the greatest array of wealth and machinery ever seen anywhere in Kansas.”¹⁸

16. Cord Scott, “The Race of the Century: 1895 Chicago,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 96 (Spring 2003); Robert Casey, “The Vanderbilt Cup, 1908,” *Technology and Culture* 40 (April 1999), 359; Flink, *The Automobile Age*, 30–31; “Paris or Bust: The Great New York-to-Paris Auto Race of 1908,” Smithsonian.com, <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/paris-or-bust-the-great-new-york-to-paris-auto-race-of-1908-116784616/?no-ist>; Randal L. Hall, “Before NASCAR: The Corporate and Civic Promotion of Automobile Racing in the American South, 1903–1927,” *Journal of Southern History* 68 (August 2002), 634–35, 637–38, 642, 644, 650–51, 655.

17. “Story of Genevieve, Antique Car, Is Reminiscent of Endurance Run of Fifty-Seven Vehicles of Varied Style and Make, a 760-Mile Round Trip of Five Days and Many Mishaps,” *Kansas City Times*, May 5, 1954.

18. “A GREAT OPENING: Greatest Automobile Showing in Kansas: Estimated over 1000 Cars Were On Grounds,” *Concordia Daily Blade*, June 2, 1914.

15. James J. Flink, *The Automobile Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), 26.

Such sensationalist language was commonly employed by Kansas newspapers in their coverage of the fairs. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were the golden age of world's expositions, and though clearly larger in scale than state or county fairs, all of these festivals served overlapping purposes. World's expositions, such as the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair, devoted attention to the future with celebratory exhibitions of modern, Western progress, particularly through display of the newest technologies. In his history of the Kansas State Fair, Thomas Percy argued that the rise of Progressivism, through its promotion of state and local governance as essential to the public good, triggered the revival of the fair in 1912 after a thirty-five-year absence. He noted that the State Fair's supporters emphasized efficient and "rational" organization of the event, as well as its potential to educate Kansans about new technologies while demonstrating the state's modern growth relative to others.¹⁹ In turn, local newspaper coverage reflected a sense of inevitable progress present at these exhibitions. Melding sensationalist journalism with narratives of exceptionalism, headlines regularly anticipated the "best fair yet," with post-fair coverage devoted to the new attendance records. After just one day at the 1915 State Fair, the *Hutchinson Gazette* proclaimed on the front page, "First Day Attendance At State Fair Biggest Ever; Exhibits Still Pouring In," adding that "it looks as if the Kansas State Fair for 1915 will certainly be the biggest and best yet." One year later, the *Gazette* concluded that the 1916 edition was indeed the best yet, asserting that the day's automobile races would "close the program of the most successful State Fair in the history of Kansas."²⁰

Such sensationalism carried over to coverage of the races. During this era, the rise of world's fairs was paralleled by the rise of the sport spectacle; in a marked departure from earlier performances (particularly live theater), these sporting events provided a new type of space in which audience participation and expression was actually encouraged. News media discovered the benefits of projecting

such spectacles to the masses. Following the six-fold increase of American newspapers between 1870 and 1900, media figures began catering their coverage toward readers' increasing interest in sports. In turn, because many professional sports were not yet very profitable (their eventual growth was facilitated by radio and television coverage), their promoters relied on newspaper exposure for survival.²¹

In Kansas, this symbiotic relationship was apparent within coverage of the automobile races. While horse races remained the largest attraction at the State Fair throughout the 1910s (as measured by audience and purse sizes), automobile racing grew increasingly popular at fairs in general. A shift in newspapers' use of the term "races," once generically used to refer to equine contests but gradually specified as "automobile," "motorcycle" or "horse" races by the mid-1910s, reflected this evolution.²² Under a headline acknowledging such change ("Chugs' Replace Beat of Horses Hoofs on Track"), the *Hutchinson Gazette* expressed anticipation of the 1912 State Fair races: "It is automobile day and there never was a better day's program arranged in this state. Nor were there so many celebrated drivers seen in any one place in the state." Two years later, the stakes apparently had been raised, as a *Gazette* headline proclaimed that the 1914 fair boasted the "Best Gasoline Program Ever Held in State," a sentiment echoed by a fair advertisement declaring this to be the "Last, Biggest and Best Two Days of Greatest Fair in Kansas History." Such sensationalism appeared in post-event coverage as well: the *Wichita Beacon* declared a 1915 race to have generated "The Greatest Crowd in the History of Wichita," while the *Winfield Courier* judged a local Fourth of July race to have been "the biggest thing in the way of amusement ever pulled off by private effort in Winfield."²³ This reference to the "Greatest Crowd"

19. Robert W. Rydell, *Fair America: World's Fairs in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000), 5–7; Percy, "A History of the Kansas State Fair, 1863–2006," 51–53, 79–87.

20. "First Day Attendance At State Fair Biggest Ever: Exhibits Still Pouring In," *Hutchinson Gazette*, September 19, 1915; "Motor Races Will Close the State Fair," *Hutchinson Gazette*, September 23, 1916.

21. Dennis Kennedy, *The Spectator and the Spectacle: Audiences in Modernity and Postmodernity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 156–58; Burstyn, *The Rites of Men*, 105; Sut Jhally, "The Spectacle of Accumulation: Material and Cultural Factors in the Evolution of the Sports/Media Complex," *Insurgent Sociologist* 12 (Summer 1984), 42–44.

22. Percy, "A History of the Kansas State Fair, 1863–2006," 127–28. As an example, the *Belleville Telescope* continued to promote unspecified "races," assumed to be horse races, in headlines as late as 1913; its coverage would shift toward automobile racing in the following half-decade.

23. Chugs' Replace Beat of Horses Hoofs on Track," *Hutchinson Gazette*, September 21, 1912; "Speed Demons Are Here for Today's Races," *Hutchinson Gazette*, September 18, 1914; "Human Wall Around

mirrors the general role of spectators within these accounts. While references to specific experiences of onlookers were rare, newspapers frequently referred to their collective size (State Fair coverage variously described the “Big Crowd,” “greatest crowd ever on the grounds,” and “largest crowd ever assembled in Kansas to witness an amusement event of any kind”), as well as their supposed “awe” and “thrills,” in order to reinforce the narrative of the grand spectacle, of which the audience is a necessary ingredient.²⁴

While many assessments of the fair’s “greatness” were clearly subjective, auto racing itself provided a more concrete opportunity for exceptionalist narrative: quantifiable speed records. In *The Speed Handbook*, cultural studies scholar Enda Duffy contended that “access to new speeds . . . especially with the automobile, has been the most empowering and excruciating new experience for people everywhere in twentieth-century modernity.” Duffy also reminded readers that in the context of the early twentieth century, even twenty-five miles per hour in the open air might feel fast, as horse-riding, bicycling, and walking had served as the primary modes of individual transportation.²⁵ Automobile racers, however, were able to far exceed this pace, and given the rapidly progressing automobile technology of the 1910s, racers broke records with regularity. This led to frequent anticipation within newspapers of unforeseen speeds, including the *Wichita Beacon*’s 1916 assessment that a new local track was “banked high enough on the curves to accommodate record smashing speed.” Two years earlier, the *Hutchinson Gazette* had confidently asserted that “Auto Speed Fiends . . . Will Establish Records Here Friday and Saturday,” and in 1918, the State Fair secretary offered bounties for record-makers: “So eager is Secretary A. L. Sponsler of the Kansas State fair to secure the world’s one mile, two, three and four mile records

for the Hutchinson track, that he has put up \$800 in prize money for the world’s record time trials . . . Sponsler is confident that some new world’s marks will be established here during the races.”²⁶ Thus not only did journalists create attention-garnering headlines, but race administrators perceived a benefit in incentivizing record-breaking performances. This illustrated the symbiotic relationship between media and promoters, who both sought to generate publicity for their respective enterprises.

When new speed records actually *were* achieved, front-page headlines established the significance of such events. This was particularly common at the State Fair, where some of the top drivers in the U.S. arrived to compete. In 1912 Barney Oldfield, described in the *Hutchinson Gazette* as the “king of world’s drivers” and “the world’s greatest driver,” generated front-page headlines as he broke the one-mile record at the State Fair’s half-mile track. Three years later, an enormous headline announced, “35,000 See John Raimey Lower One Mile Record,” with the article portraying the ultimate spectacle: a large mass of people witnessing machines traveling at remarkably high speeds. In 1917 the *Gazette*’s front-page headlines portrayed an even grander spectacle: “Records Fall Yesterday at the State Fair: Attendance and Track Records Were Smashed to Smithereens.”²⁷ Such language carried not only progress but violence, connoting that the norms of a previous era were being destroyed by a wave of modern achievement.

Celebrity drivers’ participation at the State Fair reflected another element of modernity: the cosmopolitan nature of these events, which connected Kansas to the rest of the nation, and occasionally to the world beyond. In his study of the early twentieth-century South, Hall argued that automobile races represented a form of post-Civil War “reconciliation” between the South and North, as local fans cheered on the Northern drivers who frequently participated. Race

Race Course At Speedway Park At Its Opening Yesterday,” *Wichita Beacon*, October 15, 1915; “Big Crowd At Race,” *Winfield Courier*, July 5, 1912.

24. “Auto Racers Smash Track Records Very First Day: And All State Fair Attendance Records Are Smashed Likewise—Over 100,000 With a Day to Go Yet,” *Hutchinson Gazette*, September 19, 1914; “Aimey Establishes Fast Mile Record,” *Hutchinson Gazette*, September 20, 1914; “Big Crowd Came to See Auto Races: ‘Dust Bugs’ Thrilled Biggest Wednesday Assemblage That Ever Witnessed Speed Events Here,” *Hutchinson Gazette*, September 21, 1916.

25. Enda Duffy, *The Speed Handbook: Velocity, Pleasure, Modernism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2009), 1–5.

26. “Auto Speed Fiends To Arrive Thursday,” *Hutchinson Gazette*, September 16, 1914; “\$800 In Prizes For Auto Races at State Fair,” *Hutchinson Gazette*, September 13, 1918; “Racers Are Here: Everything Ready,” *Wichita Beacon*, July 3, 1916. The term “high banks” indicates a steep slope on a track’s turns, with the outside edge of the track much higher than the inside edge. This allows cars to navigate turns without the significant deceleration necessary on a flat track.

27. “35,000 See John Raimey Lower One Mile Record,” *Hutchinson Gazette*, September 25, 1915; “Records Fall Yesterday at the State Fair,” *Hutchinson Gazette*, September 22, 1917; “Oldfield Makes New Record on Local Speed Track,” *Hutchinson Gazette*, September 22, 1912.

17th ANNUAL

Kansas State Fair

HUTCHINSON---Sept. 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, and 22

The great annual event of the State and Hutchinson's opportunity to entertain the people of her trade territory. Now is the time to get your exhibits ready for entry and you can make entries any time at our downtown office over Central State Bank.

From entries already received, we are confident of a record-breaking Fair



AUTOMOBILE RACING

During the Big Automobile Racing, Friday and Saturday, Sept. 21 and 22, will occur the great match race between Glen Breed driving a Hudson super-six and the pick of the visiting drivers and cars—a 3-mile race best 2 in 3, the first heat to be raced on Friday and the deciding heat of heats on Saturday. Eight sensational races each day.

Get a Better Baby Blank and enter your baby in the Better Baby Contest. Get the benefit of the examination and lectures—it is well worth while. Entries will not close before September 10th.

GRAND STAND BOXES

The choicest boxes except the wire will be sold good for day and night for \$30.00, good 8 days. They may be reserved for daytime only for \$15.00, or for night only for \$15.00. Boxes further from the wire may be bought for \$20.00, good for the season (8 days); or, for \$10.00 for the daytime, or reserved for night, only, for \$10.00. These boxes each have 8 seats (8 new chairs) and will be held as reserved by the purchaser for the Sunday afternoon and evening concerts. The box plan may be seen at the office of the Secretary.

Whole boxes or seats in unsold boxes may be reserved for any evening.

The concerts Sunday afternoon and evening will be given by the State Fair Band, the Redpath Hawaiian Orchestra and Chicago Grand Opera Quartette. Admission to the Grounds on Sunday will be 25c and the Grandstand Free, except Boxes.

See E. Hutton for space in the Automobile Show or for other Concessions

Everybody is invited to help make the Kansas State Fair a success.

Entertainment of the highest order is provided—day and night—something doing every minute.

Belle Beach, the far famed High School Show Horse, ridden by Tom Bass, of Mexico, Mo., will be shown before the grandstand every day, with other show horses.

Ask the Secretary for any desired information pertaining to the State Fair.

H. S. THOMPSON, President.

—GET A CATALOG—

A. L. SPONSLER, Secretary.

As an imagined portrayal, this drawing of automobile racing at the Kansas State Fair in 1917 depicts modern speed in motion and is accompanied by descriptions of the heroic masters of the machines.

hosts took pride in staging contests that represented the modernizing, urban South, with fans and sponsors also pouring into the region. Similarly, newspaper articles and advertisements in Kansas expressed pride in drawing outsiders, particularly spectators and famous drivers, to local races. Upon the opening of a new race track in Winfield in 1915, the *Beacon* posted a headline, "Speedway Roads Dotted With Cars," over the account: "Wichita is motor mad today, and not only Wichita but apparently the entire southern part of Kansas and part of Oklahoma, on account of the automobile races. From long before daylight till late this afternoon every road leading into Wichita has been literally alive with automobiles coming to the races."²⁸ The narrative celebrated Wichita's role in hosting an urban spectacle, as well as its ability to draw in Oklahoma residents from sixty or more miles away, representing an "inter-state" event.

28. "Speedway Roads Dotted With Cars," *Wichita Beacon*, October 14, 1915; Hall, "Before NASCAR," 635, 661–62.

The participation of famous drivers also linked Kansas localities to the national stage. The lead promoter of the races, J. Alex Sloan of the International Motor Contest Association (IMCA), drew competitors from well beyond the state's borders. He promised spectators the top drivers in the world, and their arrival was typically preceded by days' (sometimes a full week's) worth of anticipatory coverage. Barney Oldfield was the best-known driver in the U.S.; other racers, such as John Raimey (Cincinnati) and "Wild Bill" Endicott (Indianapolis), also lent an inter-regional flair to races at Hutchinson. Conversely, Glen Breed, the most accomplished Kansas driver of the era, acted as a state representative. In a 1913 contest at Winfield, Breed defeated W. W. Brown; as narrated in a front-page story in the *Courier*, "there was considerable feeling in this race as it was for the championship of Kansas and Missouri with Kansas winning. Breed is the champion of Kansas and Brown of Missouri." Two years later, the *Courier* noted that Breed had defeated foes beyond Kansas's borders, framing him as a type of assassin abroad: "Breed's victims are countless for he has participated in races all over the middle west and nearly always has been victorious."²⁹

Competitors from overseas added an even more cosmopolitan element to the State Fair, mirroring the increasing link between the U.S. and Europe in the 1910s as a result of World War I. Particularly in 1915, following the sinking of the *Lusitania*, and in 1918, as the conflict's end was imminent, war news existed side-by-side with festival coverage on local newspapers' front pages.³⁰ While the state's generally isolationist Progressives initially opposed entry into the war (Governor Arthur Capper was a Quaker), by

29. "Fast Races at Fair Grounds," *Winfield Courier*, July 5, 1913; "Breed Will Race Here," *Winfield Courier*, May 11, 1915; Percy, "A History of the Kansas State Fair, 1863–2006," 127.

30. Though World War I clearly occupied a prominent place in Kansans' imaginations, local men did not directly enter the war until mid- to late 1917. In her study of Kansan soldiers' experiences in Europe, "An 'All Kansas' Regiment: the 353d Infantry Goes to War" (*Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 29 [Autumn 2006]), Sandra Reddish focused on their athletic and arms training, with little mention of driving vehicles. Thus it is unclear whether many of these men first drove an automobile in the military before returning to civilian life.

TODAY—Entire Change of Program
—AT THE—

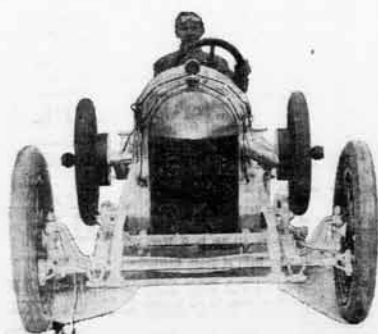
Automobile :-: Races

KANSAS STATE FAIR GROUNDS

25 MILE SWEEPSTAKE RACE

5 ENTRIES

EVENT ONE—3 entries.
EVENT TWO—John Raimey will attempt to lower track record for 5 miles.
EVENT THREE—4 entries.
EVENT FOUR—Novelty tire and wheel change race.
EVENT FIVE—Free for all attempt to lower track records.
EVENT SIX—Kansas State Fair Sweepstakes.
EVENT SEVEN—To be announced.



JOHN RAIMEY
of Cincinnati

Who took part in last year's races, holds the record for the fastest mile ever driven in this state.



FRED H'OREY
The French-Canadian

At the wheel of the Fiat Tornado, the only distinctively foreign combination entered in the Kansas State Fair auto races today.



"WILD" BILL ENDICOTT
The Famous Indianapolis Racer

He has competed over practically every famous road, track and speedway course in America from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast and with Barney Oldfield was the first American to take up professional race driving.

A 1915 advertisement in the *Hutchinson Gazette* exhibits the talent the Kansas State Fair drew to its races, including John Raimey (Cincinnati), Fred H'Orey (Canada), and "Wild Bill" Endicott (Indianapolis).

1917 pro-war sentiment was strong, leading to both military enlistment and the "Americanization" plan of the Kansas State Council of Defense (including the elimination of German psychology and philosophy from the University of Kansas).³¹ Given this jingoistic wave, it is unsurprising that all European drivers competing in Kansas appeared to hail from Allied countries. Louis Disbrow, described by the *Hutchinson Gazette* as a "little Frenchman" who "holds more official world's records than any other two drivers combined," stoked fascination with his car, the Jay-Eye-See. In its preview coverage of the 1914 State

Fair, the *Gazette* labeled the Jay-Eye-See (in its usual sensationalist language) "the world's most powerful racing car," adding that "its 290 horsepower motor is capable of driving the car better than 150 miles an hour." One year later, the French-Canadian driver Fred H'Orey arrived to compete, and by 1918, the State Fair boasted a truly international field, as well as a major accomplishment: the IMCA sanctioned the Sunflower Sweepstakes, a twenty-five-mile race at the fair. Bill Endicott out-dueled Leon Duray, the "great French speed star," while the Norwegian Sig Hougdaahl defeated Glen Breed in a separate series of five-mile races.³² This final competition, between

31. Miner, *Kansas*, 233–38. In addition to the "Americanization" plan, anti-German sentiment was reflected by mob attacks on Kansans with German surnames.

32. "Six Great Drivers Enter Auto Races," *Hutchinson Gazette*, September 13, 1914; "\$2,500 Auto Race at Fair to Help Decide World's

a home-state racer and a Scandinavian challenger, indicated not only the increasing pace of modern life, but the resultant shrinking of the globe as a product of accelerated transportation.

These automobile racers were frequently described in heroic terms: as such, they emerged as exemplars of not only modernity, but of the increasingly performed white masculinity that emerged in the early twentieth century. The vast majority of drivers were men, and the rare female racer did not join her male counterparts on the track for the “official” contests. On July 5, 1916, under the headline “She Wants to Fly,” the *Wichita Beacon* published an account of Elfrieda Mais, who generated significant attention upon her arrival for an exhibition race. The article opened with light-hearted coverage of female racers, noting Mais’s belief that “no woman can be a racer and wear good looking clothes at the same time. ‘Why, just look how soiled one gets,’ said the young woman as she pointed to a large grease spot on her silk stocking.” In general, through its focus on racing as corrupting her clean appearance, the article both represented her gender violations and belittled her accomplishments through an aesthetic orientation.³³

The confluence of whiteness and cleanliness (highlighted in the article by references to Mais’s “white” and “freckled” skin) echoed larger racial dynamics as well: while newspaper coverage of *races* rarely offered specific reference to *race*, visual representations of drivers were consistently embedded with whiteness. The *Wichita Eagle*’s promotional advertisement for the 1916 Independence Day races reflected such a pattern. Mais was conspicuously gendered by her centering as the “Queen” among “Kings,” yet her apparent whiteness facilitated her race-based integration within the group. Furthermore, the presence of Canadian and French drivers in this image served as a reminder that not only did international drivers all hail from Allied countries, but from northern and western Europe—widely regarded as homelands of desirable “old stock” whiteness, in contrast to more recent immigrants from eastern and

southern Europe. On the other hand, the grime visible on some faces in these profiles, seemingly a product of dirt-track racing, created a sense of “dirty,” rugged whiteness, aesthetically countering the notions of white “purity” and civility widely espoused at the time.³⁴

Newspaper stories constructed such white masculinity around both the technical mastery required to handle the new machines and the courage required to engage in such a dangerous undertaking. In fact, undertakers were regularly involved with the sport; fatal accidents, both to drivers and spectators, were well documented in the press. The *Hutchinson Gazette* carried a 1911 story about a race in Syracuse, New York, in which a car leaped into a crowd, killing nine people, just after President Taft had exited. In 1915, just over a week before construction of the new local speedway, the *Wichita Eagle* published a front-page story about an accident in Iowa that killed two people. Kansans experienced death on the track as well. In 1918 the *Belleville Telescope* reported an accident at the Cloud County Fair in which a race car barrel-rolled into the crowd, killing a spectator and injuring four others.³⁵

The specter of death looming over the sport led to an exclamatory article in the *Wichita Beacon*:

In twelve months—14 killed! That is the price, in human blood, the craze for speed has exacted from the ranks of America’s greatest auto racing drivers. . . . The last to be snatched away by the ‘craze’ was ‘Bobby’ Burman—Wild Bob they called him all over the world—who died in Los Angeles last April, under the wreckage of the powerful machines that had made him a fortune.”

34. For a summary of turn-of-the-century tensions around whiteness in the context of new immigrant groups, see David Roediger, “A Nation Stays White: How Race Survived Mass Immigration,” chap. 5 in *How Race Survived U.S. History: From Settlement and Slavery to the Obama Phenomenon* (New York: Verso, 2008). Julian Carter broadly addressed the link between whiteness and “normality,” and the importance of maintaining white “purity,” during this era in *The Heart of Whiteness: Normal Sexuality and Race in America, 1880–1940* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007).

35. “Nine Slain, More Injured,” *Hutchinson Gazette*, September 17, 1911; “Four Killed and Injured in Race,” *Wichita Eagle*, August 8, 1915; “AUTOMOBILE ACCIDENT: Lawrence Lavendusky [sic] Killed and Chester Ball and Three Others Injured Friday,” *Belleville Telescope*, August 8, 1918. In an indication of the unsurprising nature of death at these races (and newspapers’ efforts to positively promote the fair), this front-page story was printed directly next to another, “1918 Fair Was A

Championship,” *Hutchinson Gazette*, September 18, 1918; “Breed Wins First Auto Heat in Auto Race But Loses [sic] Other Two,” *Hutchinson Gazette*, September 21, 1918. The IMCA continues to sanction races in Kansas nearly a century later.

33. “Motor Races Tame; She Wants To Fly: Elfrieda Mais Tells of Her Ambition,” *Wichita Beacon*, July 5, 1916.



In anticipation of the July 4, 1916, races in Wichita, the *Eagle* published this promotional mosaic of visiting drivers. It highlights gender and national diversity while reiterating the normativity of masculinity and whiteness, though the latter category is presented in a somewhat shaded, "dirty" iteration.

This narrative captured the price to be paid by the daring participants, with nicknames like "Wild Bill" and "Wild Bob," whose machines carried possibilities of both glory and death. In a revealing moment, Wichita race promoter Tim Hurst, when interviewed for the article, remarked that "people think the flying game is dangerous, but it isn't. . . . It's tame when compared with auto racing. I was looking over my scrap books last night and discovered that out of 39 licensed drivers a year ago only 25 are left." While some readers might have been disturbed by the high fatality rates, this promoter openly acknowledged the danger involved, even implying that it is more authentic than the risk claimed by aviators. In turn, the article did not carry a very condemnatory tone, closing with an excited flourish: "And they go racing on!"³⁶

Such danger distinguished automobile racing from most other sports of the era. Many American

health reformers promoted athletics as a path toward healthy bodies and strong morals, particularly for the nation's men. However, auto racing represented a clear departure from this model, particularly in regards to bodily health. In fact, the 1916 *Wichita Eagle* promotional image of Elfrieda Mais also featured Joe Cleary (#8), described in the caption as the "'crippled daredevil,' who wins despite physical defects caused by his reckless plunging."³⁷ Not only were injury- and death-inducing accidents common, but routine practice imposed great strain on the body as well. Unlike modern race car drivers, who ameliorate risk through roll cages, helmets, and safety belts, competitors of the early twentieth century were protected by little more than a cloth helmet, goggles, and the ability to tightly grip the wheel. With no windshield, drivers braced themselves against the onslaught of wind, leading to a somewhat odd *Hutchinson Gazette* headline: "Motor Car Racers Can Not Open Their Mouths." The writer remarked that "a motor car racing driver who whirls through space at the rate of sixty and seventy miles

Success," which only briefly and vaguely mentioned "the unfortunate accident which occurred."

36. "14 Motor Racers Were Killed in the Past Twelve Months," *Wichita Beacon*, July 1, 1916.

37. *Wichita Eagle*, July 2, 1916; Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 92–93.

an hour cannot shout to his opponent to 'shut 'er off,' without slowing down, for if he does, there is the risk that he will not get his mouth shut again," given that it is continually filled with air.³⁸ The article clued readers in to the very real strain imposed by auto racing, particularly on the bodies of the drivers themselves.

In turn, newspaper accounts noted the skill and occasional bluster exhibited by drivers under such conditions. In "Motor Car Racers Can Not Open Their Mouths," the writer added that not only must a driver clench his jaw shut, but "the motor car driver must be strong physically as it takes almost superhuman strength to guide a motor car running sixty miles an hour, the momentum in the rapidly revolving wheels making them doubly hard to turn." That is, in the case of racing, "control" necessitated not only skill but sheer bodily power. Newspapers also addressed the drivers' embrace of risk, including a *Wichita Eagle* headline, "Ten Dare-Devil Drivers Will Flirt With Death Today." This was accompanied by a representation of swaggering, confident competitors who exchanged heated words the night before the race. Driver George Clark was quoted as declaring to "Will Bill" Endicott, "I'll run you out of gasoline and into the ditch," to which Endicott replied, "If you do, you boob, you'll go faster than that old boat can take you." The following day, the *Eagle* headline announced, "7000 People Watch Clark Keep Promise," before confirming that "George Clark kept his word. The threat that he thrust in the face of 'Wild Bill' Endicott Monday night was carried out yesterday afternoon on the west side race track, when he literally 'ran 'em out of gasoline.'" ³⁹ Through such accounts, the *Eagle* constructed a narrative of masculine performance, emphasizing the men's confidence as they prepared to face both their opponents and the danger of the race track.

This may also be characterized as an increasingly urbanized version of masculinity on display. In his study of late nineteenth-century manhood in Kansas, Peter Nadeau argued, "despite the new emphasis placed on masculine power in the cities, rural areas largely rejected the urban paradigm and maintained a traditional emphasis on manly virtue." He contrasted

such latter "manhood," built around responsibility and self-control, with the "ethic of masculinity" that was marked by performances of toughness and power. As one root cause, Nadeau pointed to the fact that in rural areas, opportunities for public performance (sports events and otherwise) were limited, thus restricting displays of enacted masculinity. Furthermore, codes of respectable manhood were frequently rooted in Christianity, as the "man of God" tempered his "sensual appetite," though many Protestant leaders in the U.S. were also advocating for the performance of a more masculine "muscular Christianity" through the fusion of religion and sports. This sheds light on a striking element of the State Fair: while it retained an emphasis on displays of agriculture, reflecting the still-rural majority of Kansas residents, the festival nonetheless provided opportunities for performances of masculinity, centered on danger and death, which had been generally lacking in the rural areas of the state.⁴⁰

Barney Oldfield, as the best-known automobile racer in the country, generated particularly revealing iterations of masculine-hero mythology. He frequently toured the country for racing exhibitions, even participating in a highly publicized driving contest with Jack Johnson, the first black heavyweight boxing champion.⁴¹ When Oldfield visited Kansas, newspapers granted him substantial coverage, including a 1912 *Hutchinson Gazette* column on the driver's courage. The writer claimed that Oldfield "has traveled faster than two miles a minute on a straightaway and many times has grazed the grim reaper as he dared death. Barney has been through so many fences and has experienced so many thrilling accidents that he has lost count of them and has ceased to think of his past career." This narrative constructed Oldfield as both risk-taking and forward thinking, reflecting the modern, masculine man. He demonstrated his prowess through mastery of a powerful Christie automobile, as documented by

38. "Motor Car Racers Can Not Open Their Mouths," *Hutchinson Gazette*, September 26, 1915.

39. "Ten Dare-Devil Drivers Will Flirt With Death Today," *Wichita Eagle*, July 4, 1916; "7000 People Watch Clark Keep Promise," *Wichita Eagle*, July 5, 1916.

40. Peter M. Nadeau, "Microcosm of Manhood: Abilene, Eisenhower, and Nineteenth-Century Male Identity," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 37 (Autumn 2014): 150–52; Percy, "A History of the Kansas State Fair, 1863–2006," 2, 100. On the general promotion of sports practice by British and American Protestants during this era, see Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880–1920* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001).

41. Rick Knott, "The Jack Johnson v. Barney Oldfield Match Race of 1910," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 29 (January 2005): 39–53.

the *Wichita Beacon* in 1915: "It is a freakish affair. . . . He is the only man in the world who is capable of 'tooling' this 'Mankiller,' as it has been named because it has been responsible for the death of three who attempted to drive it."⁴² Thus unlike other men, who attempted this feat but were incapable of exercising dominance over a homicidal machine, Oldfield exhibited his masculinity through demonstrations of power and control.

This *Beacon* representation, combined with other narratives of daring, skillful drivers, suggests that these figures might be best examined not as the athlete-hero, but rather as an iteration of another emergent symbolic figure in this period: the cowboy. During the first decades of the twentieth century, the mythology of the "Old West" was growing through literary and live-performance representation, and Kansas Territory was included in the frontier imaginary.⁴³ Civic leaders did not always embrace their city's position in this mythology, as witnessed in Wichita and Abilene, where early twentieth-century public officials and writers preferred to emphasize more "respectable" elements of the cities' histories, particularly local business leadership, than the cattle herders who had moved through the area in earlier decades. Regardless, Wild West shows grew as an entertainment spectacle during this era; as evidenced by a 1912 *Hutchinson Gazette* advertisement, such shows were held at the Kansas State Fair.⁴⁴ At these imagined representations of the mythical West, cowboys took center stage as the embodiment of rugged western masculinity. Historian Michael Allen noted that the "Cowboy Code" (emerging in conjunction with Wild West Shows) included an emphasis on courage, anti-intellectualism, and individualism. Furthermore, according to Michael Kimmel, "Individual acts were



The *Wichita Beacon* published this photograph of Barney Oldfield in anticipation of his visit in 1915. The caption notes, "This is one of the few pictures of Barney snapped without his countenance being concealed by the dirt and grime of the track."

extolled for their 'peril to life and limb'; commentators were awed by the 'sheer nerve' of the bareback rider, and one waxed poetic about broncos—"murderers that plunge with homicidal fury beneath the cinches of leather of a saddle."⁴⁵

Clearly, the description of Barney Oldfield's "Mankiller" car corresponded to this characterization of broncos; Oldfield tamed his automobile with his feet not in cinches, but pressed firmly on pedals. Kimmel

42. "Barney Oldfield Arrives Tomorrow," *Hutchinson Gazette*, September 19, 1912; "Oldfield's Two Racing Cars and Thompson Are Here," *Wichita Beacon*, October 11, 1915.

43. Robert R. Dykstra and Jo Ann Manfra, "The Circle Dot Cowboys at Dodge City: History and Imagination in Andy Adams's *The Log of a Cowboy*," *Western Historical Quarterly* 33 (Spring 2002): 19–40; Robert A. Mead, "Cowboys and Lawyers: Ambivalence and Myth in the History and Literature of the Southern Plains," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 30 (Spring 2007): 52–63; Jay Price, "Cowboy Boosterism: Old Cowtown Museum and the Image of Wichita, Kansas," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 24 (Winter 2001–2002): 300–317.

44. Price, "Cowboy Boosterism," 302–5 (on Wichita); Nadeau, "Microcosm of Manhood," 154–55 (on Abilene). Cattle drives from Texas to Kansas were common between the 1860s and 1880s, but by

the end of the century, Kansas had established itself as the third-largest cattle producer in the country. So-called Cowboy Wars, in which gangs of outlaws faced off with townspeople in western Kansas, garnered national attention in the 1880s. Miner, *Kansas*, 170–71; "Cowboys," *Kansapedia*, <http://www.ksks.org/kansapedia/cowboys/15597>.

45. Michael Allen, *Rodeo Cowboys in the North American Imagination* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1998), 29; Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 100–101.

The Kansas State Fair

❁ NOW GOING ON ❁

❁ BIGGER AND BETTER ❁

GREAT RACING

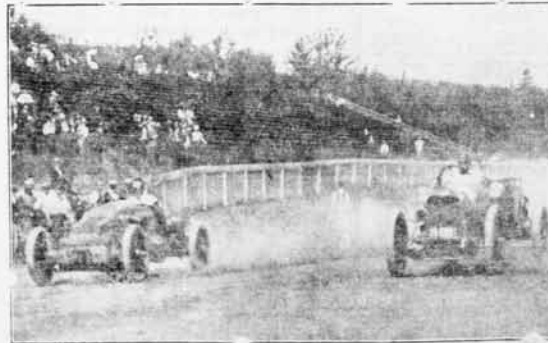
Irwin's Wild West
TONIGHT



Great Free Attractions

Wortham & Allen
CARNIVAL

Automobile Day SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 21



Barney Oldfield

With his 300 horsepower Christie Automobile, at expense of about \$25,000.00 will give thrilling speed exhibitions and race against time Saturday afternoon, Sept. 21, on the State Fair ground track. He also carries with him the Prince Henry Benz with noted driver.

Barney Oldfield in his 300-horsepower Christie and Len Timmerman in the Prince Henry Benz, to be seen here Saturday, September 21.

The Association will offer a purse for free-for-all 10 mile race for drivers of any other machine

This Hutchinson Gazette advertisement fuses two major stages of masculine performance at the 1912 Kansas State Fair: the Wild West show and automobile races. With cowboys clinging to their broncos above, the bottom caption predicts that driver Barney Oldfield "will give thrilling speed exhibitions and race against time" on the track.

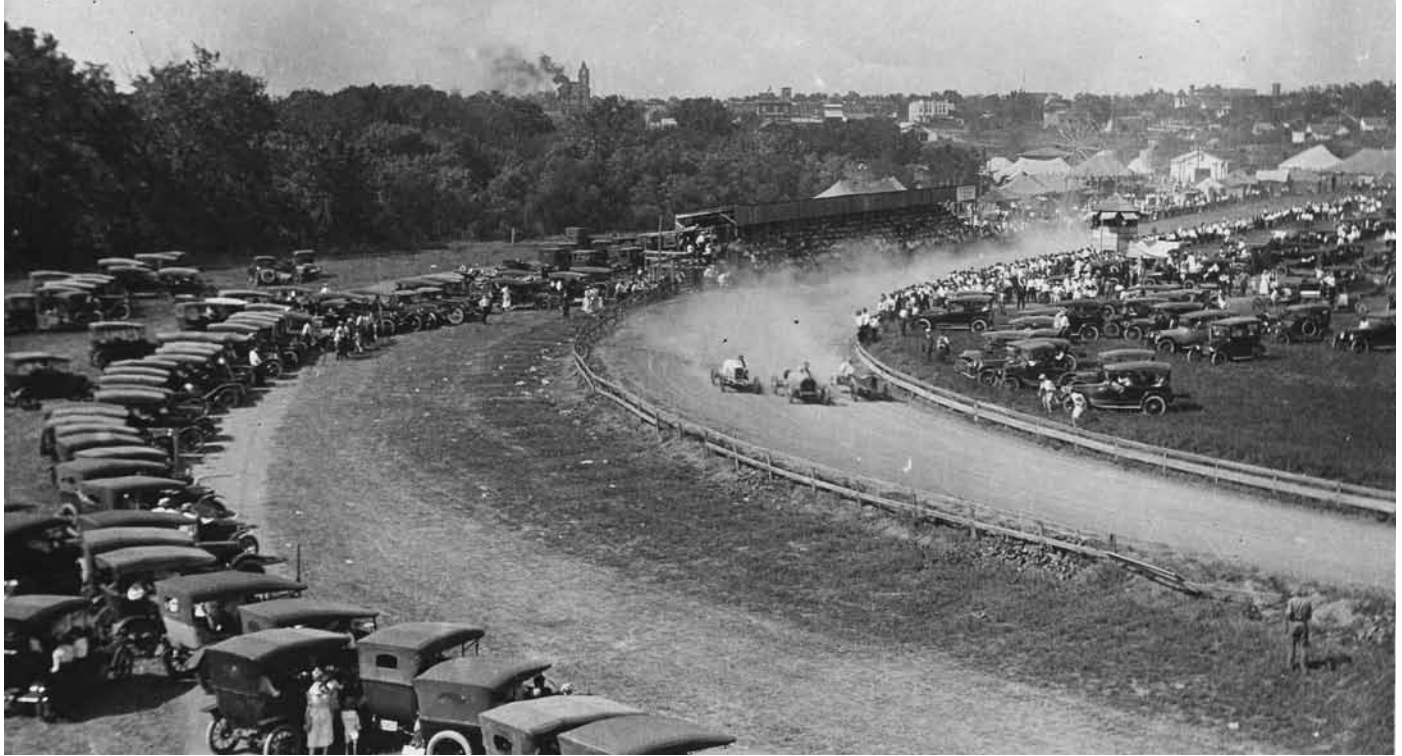
also remarked that "as a mythic creation the cowboy was fierce and brave, willing to venture into unknown territory," and competitive drivers ventured into the territory of velocities that no human being had ever experienced on land. To offer a point of reference, as drivers approached 60-mile-per-hour averages at the Winfield race track in 1913, city officials were posting speed limit signs around the edge of town for visitors: 12 miles per hour.⁴⁶ This only magnified the speed of top drivers like Oldfield, who were rumored (perhaps dubiously) to be reaching 120 miles per hour at some tracks. Such vehicular velocity does raise an important distinction: while the mythical cowboy

was placed squarely in the past, riding the horse of yesteryear, the automobile racer combined atavistic notions of masculinity with elements of modernity.⁴⁷ That is, while the driver braved the great outdoors, complete with dirt-filled air and physical danger, he also mastered the modern machine. In this sense, he occupied both past and present.

George Clark was one such driver, and as documented in this article's opening, a *Wichita Eagle*

46. "Speed Signs Placed," *Winfield Courier*, July 7, 1913.

47. As another distinction, Wild West Shows were gradually being replaced by rodeos during this period. While Wild West Shows were more scripted performances, rodeos were scored competitions; thus, while the Kansas State Fair still staged Wild West shows in the 1910s, automobile races more closely resembled rodeos in format. See Allen, *Rodeo Cowboys in the North American Imagination*, 21–22.



Spectators parked their Model T Fords on both the inside and outside of the track before watching the automobile races at the Ottawa County Fair in Minneapolis, Kansas, in August 1917.

reporter accompanied Clark for a two-mile tour around a race track in 1916, before richly describing the sensation of controlled chaos and velocity for his readers. The text carried a sense of terrified excitement, as contrasted with the steely resolve of the driver. By the end of the account, the writer revealed why he titled the story “Racing is Disease,” announcing an epiphany toward the end of the experience:

And then I laughed at myself to think I’d been so yellow. I didn’t pray any more prayers to save anyone. But the prayer uttered next was directed at that engine. It said, “Go faster! Go faster!” And it did. The curves and the roars and the dust bothered no longer. I was affected, too. Now I’m ill. I want to go back again.⁴⁸

The reporter had been converted to the gospel of speed, and judging by his closing remarks, a return to the past was implausible.

However, it was not merely a conversion to the modern: he also implied that he had discovered a new sense of rugged masculinity, drawing on the cues of the confident driver. By the end, the passenger derided his initial cowardice and embraced the thrills accompanying danger, even if this meant he was “ill.” Though most spectators and media figures in Kansas did not experience high-speed driving so intimately, the speed “disease” clearly spread across the state, and steadily growing audiences flocked to automobile races as the 1910s progressed. In this sense, modern thrills were not only present within the actual races, but produced by the mere assembly of thousands (or tens of thousands) of people for a single event, particularly rare in a largely rural state. The public track thus became a site at which masculinity and progress, already intertwined as constructions, were performed as spectacle, projecting an idealized version of the local as engaged with twentieth-century modernity. [KH]

48. “Racing is Disease” *Wichita Eagle*, July 6, 1916.