

The Eclectic Bicycle

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Published on idrottsforum.org 2017-05-29

Beginning with its 19th century appearance, the bicycle has been used to tour, to race, to commute. It has been used to improve health and vitality, to escape either the everyday cares of the world or to leave a closed society for a free one. At the same time the bicycle breaks down barriers it also divides people. Collectively, the books in this review highlight the many varied roles the bicycle plays in Western society. Included are books on the wheel's history,

long distance travel, touring, racing and how the bicycle plays an increasing role in social advocacy.

Duncan Jamieson is a professor of history at Ashland University, Ashland, Ohio, U.S.A. His areas of interest are how ideas have shaped the nation's history and place in the world, which includes specifically sport and the sporting tradition. He sees these two fields of study intersect in bicycling and its place in Western society.

The 1815 eruption of Mount Tambora on the island of Sumbawa in what is today Indonesia created an ash cloud which encircled the globe, causing a drop in temperature, a year without a summer and massive crop failures. In 1817, due to a shortage of horses resulting from the lack of fodder, Karl von Drais created a rudimentary two wheeled machine, propelled by sitting between the wheels and scooting the feet along the ground, to patrol the Duke of Baden's woods. Over the next 60 years modifications and improvements to the Draisine, as the machine came to be called, led to the high wheel bicycle in the 1870s, followed a decade later by the diamond frame safety, the standard bicycle today. Together, these machines revolutionized personal travel, created a new sport and advanced a new kind of advocacy. Now, two hundred years later, though largely unknown, I am certain von Drais would be amazed by his accomplishment. Though eclipsed by the automobile, hundreds of millions of men, women and children continue to ride bicycles to school or work in an office or factory, to race as a professional or amateur, to relax and enjoy time outdoors, or to advocate for a variety of causes. Some ride by choice; others out of necessity. The bicycle, and increasingly for some the tricycle, is used to commute to work or to school, to go to the store or run errands, to compete, or to travel. People ride to save money, to improve their health, to escape from boredom or the cares of the world. They pedal on tracks called velodromes, on and off road, to the corner, to town, to the state line, to another country, another continent or around the world. They ride in all seasons of the year, the heat of summer and the bone chilling cold of winter; they ride in monsoon rain and through drought; they ride in daylight and darkness.

What makes the bicycle so interesting is its pervasive place in human society. They are everywhere. These machines, new or used, can be inexpensive, making them available to those of limited means. They can be adapted with small motors to ease the workload. Tricycles eliminate both balance issues and the fear of falling. Arm powered machines make wheeling possible for paraplegics. The vision impaired can serve as stoker on a tandem, enjoying the physical and psychological benefits of cycling just as much as the sighted captain. One of my favorite rides is the Great Five Boro Bike Tour, held every May in New York City. Thirty thousand bicyclists gather in Lower Manhattan to ride up the island and through the Bronx, Queens, Brooklyn and Staten Island. At its peak, as many as 6,500 cyclists paid to complete The Tour of the Scioto River Valley (TOSRV), riding 105 miles from Columbus to Portsmouth, Ohio on Saturday and then back to Columbus on Sunday. This did not include the hundreds of "bandits" who followed

the route without registering. At the same time, the words of Joseph Pennell that all people who own bicycles are not cyclists remain as true today as they did when he wrote them in the late 19th century. Approximately twelve million bicycles have been sold in the United States each year of the 21st century, but it is a safe assumption that after a few rides many of them end up collecting dust in the basement or garage. While adolescents may be committed to their wheels, an alternative term for the bicycle, once they earn a driver's license the bicycle is all too often forgotten. However, this is not always the case. Large and small, cities around the world are modifying their infrastructure to accommodate ever increasing numbers of adults on two and three wheels who enjoy life in the slow lane.

Many who rode also wrote. Almost as soon as the high wheel appeared in the 1870s, some riders began writing articles for newspapers and magazines while others wrote books. Men and women wrote of the properties of this wheel over that wheel, how to ride and care for one's wheel, what to take and how to pack; of journeys real or imagined; of ways to use cycling as a means to social improvement; of records in either time, distance or both; and even at this early time histories of the wheel itself. Charles E. Pratt authored *The American Bicyclist* (Boston: Houghton Good and Company, 1879). Thomas Stevens became the first of many to bicycle around the world, providing readers with a two-volume narrative of his exploits, *Around the World on a Bicycle* (London: Century, 1888). Florine Thayer advocated for woman's rights through a tricycle ride undertaken by four adventuresome young women, *Wheels and Whims* (Boston: Cupples, Upham, 1884). Englishman Robert Louis Jefferson set both speed and distance records in the 1890s, which he shared with readers in *Awheel to Moscow and Back* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1895) and *Across Siberia on a Bicycle* (London: The Cycle Press, 1896). H. Hewitt Griffin's *Cycles and Cycling* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1897) included several chapters on the early history of the wheel.

Over the last one hundred fifty years most people writing about cycling are, like me, cyclists themselves. As a long-distance cyclist, my particular area of expertise is cycle traveling. I have completed one trans-America ride, from the Pacific near Los Angeles, California to the Atlantic above Boston, Massachusetts, approximately 3,700 miles in 42 days. I have ridden the 750 miles from Ashland, Ohio, to Provincetown, Massachusetts. I have completed hundreds of organized rides, most of them centuries (rides of 100 miles in less than twelve hours) in several states, including five Assaults on Mt. Mitchell, which begins in Spartanburg, South Carolina, 807 feet (246

meters) above sea level), and ends on the summit of Mount Mitchell, North Carolina 6,684 feet (2,037 meters) above sea level, the highest point in the eastern United States. It has been listed by *Bicycling* as one of the ten toughest centuries in the United States, and the only one east of the Mississippi. As an historian I am especially interested in the bicycle's history and development. Though I have never raced, I do have an interest in bicycle racing, witnessing bicycle races here in the United States as well as in Scotland. Within history my specialty is intellectual history, how ideas intersect and the impact they have on human society, which leads me to books in this vein.

One of the pleasures of university life is the opportunity to review books in one's areas of teaching and research interest. Books on cycling follow the interest in the wheel, which at the moment is resurgent. Below you will find several books on the varying aspects of human powered cycles and their place in society.

History of the Cycle

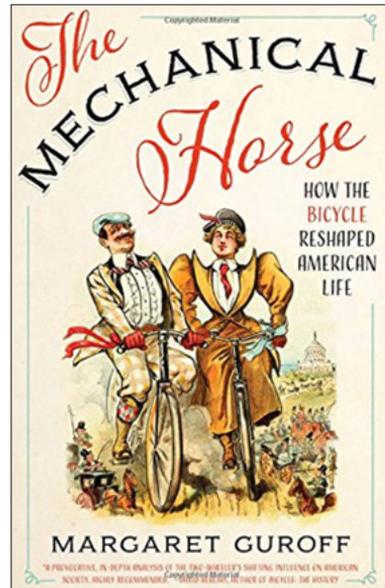
Margaret Guroff teaches writing at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, as well as editing a magazine in Washington, D. C. She also edits and publishes *Power Moby-Dick*, an online annotation of Melville's novel. A bicycle commuter in the Greater Washington D. C. area, she is well aware that bicycles are both faster and more efficient than automobiles. This often frustrates drivers who sometimes vent their anger at cyclists, even though it is other drivers who clog the roads. While there are many histories of the bicycle only a few are recent. Guroff's is especially useful for placing the bicycle in its social context.

There are some common misconceptions relative to the bicycle in American society. First, way too much emphasis is placed on the "Bicycle Boom" of the mid to late 1890s, and this leads people to believe that the rise of the automobile led to the collapse of the bicycle. While there is some truth to both beliefs, the problem becomes when people funnel the entire history of the bicycle through either one. The bicycle did pave the way for the automobile, providing a variety of technical and engineering innovations. Many early automobile manufacturers began with bicycles. (In the same vein, the bicycle ushered in the age of powered flight; the Wright Brothers used their bicycle expertise to build their *Wright Flyer* which went aloft in December, 1903.) In the late 1890s the number of bicycles manufactured and sold in

the United States exploded and then collapsed, in part because the industry over built and because there was a growing availability of inexpensive used wheels on the market. While over time the majority of Americans did shift from bicycles to automobiles, millions of people continue to use the bicycle to travel, to commute to and from work, for exercise, or to take a leisurely ride through the neighborhood. Building on the idea proposed by Glen Norcliffe, the bicycle has paved the way for our modern scientific society. While it did not usher in the germ theory of medicine, it has proved the value of exercise for all people, regardless of age or condition.

There are many other connections between modern society and the bicycle which Guroff explores. In conjunction with the streetcar, the bicycle provided a means for middle class Americans to move to the more bucolic suburbs while continuing to work in the city. The bicycle also helped to usher Americans into becoming a consumer society. In the 1890s S. S. McClure, who began in publishing editing two bicycle magazines for Colonel A. A. Pope, revolutionized publishing when he launched *McClure's* magazine at a cut rate price. McClure forced other popular publishers to cut their prices and rely on advertising to offset publication costs. Among the leading advertisers were bicycle manufacturers.

Guroff looks at bicycling from its early days, offering fascinating insights that connect the earlier years with the present. As human beings always seem interested in speed, those who rode swiftly on the 19th century city streets earned the sobriquet of “scorcher,” threatening the lives and limbs of urban pedestrians. Scorchers were predominantly young men (and occasionally women) who rode as rapidly as possible, usually in bent, aerodynamic posture that physicians feared would ruin their posture as well as their health. In an interesting comparison, Guroff brings together the late 19th century scorcher with the mid to late 20th century bicycle messenger.



Margaret Guroff
**The Mechanical Horse:
 How the Bicycle Reshaped
 American Life**
 295 pages, hardcover.
 Austin, TX: University of
 Texas Press 2016 (Discovering
 America Series)
 ISBN 978-0-292-74362-5

While Western Union employed boys (and sometimes girls) with bicycles to deliver telegrams from the 1890s until technology made them obsolete in the 1960s, bicycle messengers appeared as an anti-establishment cult society in the 1970s and 80s. Dressed for comfort and the weather, they ignored the rules and etiquette of urban, business society, yet until fax technology in the late 1970s and email attachments in the 1980s thinned their numbers dramatically, they moved critical, time sensitive information across the cityscape. Many of these individuals lived for the thrill the job offered.

Interest in bicycling in the United States and Western Europe has gone through boom and bust cycles, which continue to the present day. Two booms came together in the 1970s to dramatically expand bicycling's reach. Adventurous young men in the greater San Francisco area began experimenting with older, heavy, balloon tire bicycles, riding them down hills off road, as fast as they could. They modified the bicycles by adding suspension, heavy duty brakes and derailleurs, creating the first mountain bikes. If used on paved roads they provided the rider with a cushioned ride in a more upright position. Though not as aerodynamic as the thin tired touring and racing bicycles they drew more people to bicycling. About the same time, Bikecentennial appeared, encouraging two thousand people to ride across the United States, along with a few thousand more who rode part of the way. This led to an organization that continues to encourage long distance bicycle travel.

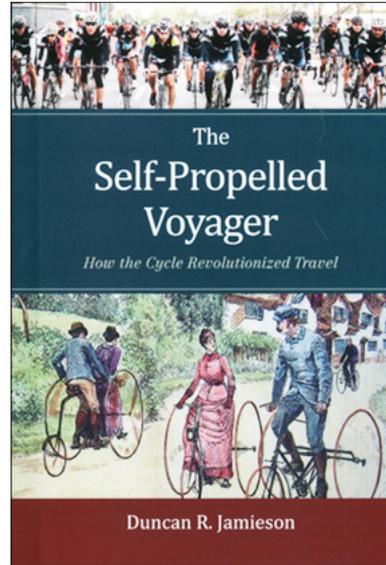
Today, the interest in the bicycle is on the rise. More bicycle lanes and paths are appearing in cities around the nation. Bike shares are on the rise in many cities, where for a modest cost people can rent a bicycle on the street, ride it across town and leave it there for the next user. Ebikes, with top speeds of twenty miles an hour, are available for aging baby boomers. Fixies with only one speed are the bicycle of choice for the urban hipsters who are striving for a radical form of rebellion. Cargo bikes are also among the newest fads in bicycle culture. While it may still be viewed as a child's toy, offering youngsters their first real taste of freedom, "the bike is finally living up to its original promise /.../ the bicycle has become a reliable, affordable, socially acceptable mechanical horse, attainable by any [person] who wants one" (p162).

Two (and three) wheel traveling on six of the globe's seven continents

My history, *The Self-propelled Voyager*, focusing on the rise and development of long distance bicycle (and tricycle) travel, was reviewed for idrottsforum.org by Bill Sund and reprinted here by kind permission. Within travel literature a new genre appeared, devoted to, in the words of Englishman Bernard Newman, the self-propelled voyager. My girlfriend, now wife, Kristine, found a copy of Irving Leonard's *When Bikehood was in Flower* (Tucson, AZ: Seven Palms Press, 1987) in a used bookstore. This collection of essays by the American historian and avid bicyclist exposed me to a new genre of literature and a new area of research. I began with the idea of writing of wheeling in the late 19th century, but found that despite the popular belief in the "bicycle boom" of the 1890s, people continued to ride prodigious distances and write fascinating descriptions of their travels on wheels.

In our time, the bicycle is completely taken for granted. It is used as an ordinary means of transportation for shorter or longer distances, or for long eventful trips within a country, or in other countries, or across multiple countries or an entire continent. It is also a means for competition in the increasingly growing, and now global sport of cycling. This has obviously not always been the case. The story of cycling began about 200 years ago, when the so-called treadmill was invented in Germany. Then pedal-powered bicycles were produced in France; the chain driven bike, known as the safety bicycle, was introduced in England; and pneumatic tires were invented in Ireland. These important inventions dates back to various times from 1817 until 1888.

By the late 1880s, safety bicycles were mass produced, and cycling became an accessible means of transportation for more and more people. Be-



Duncan R. Jamieson
**The Self-Propelled Voyager:
 How the Cycle Revolutionized
 Travel**

193 pages, h/c, ill.
 Lanham, MD: Rowman &
 Littlefield 2015
 ISBN 978-1-4422-5370-4

fore that, to acquire and ride the velocipede, also known as boneshaker for its discomfort, with its large front wheel to which pedals were connected, required both healthy finances and physical strength. Furthermore, since the velocipede had no proper brakes, riding it was quite risky.

The extensive and exciting history of the bicycle and how it transformed people's lives in terms of travel, making it a lot easier to move from place to place, has attracted the attention of the American social and sports historian Duncan R. Jamieson. In his new book *The Self-Propelled Voyager: How the Cycle Revolutionized Travel*, he does not deal with the sport of cycling and its great world-famous races such as Tour de France or Giro d'Italia. That would require a completely different approach, and instead he focuses long distance pedaling, which is a much older practice than you might think. Already during the second half of the 1800s cycling enthusiasts in the upper social classes began to ride across their respective countries, such as across the United States. One can barely imagine how tough that must have been, given the bicycles of the era.

In Sweden, which is not addressed in the book, they cycled around Lake Mälaren already in 1892, which is about 340 kilometers, with participation from intellectuals and artists. At that time the safety bicycles were available, fairly low chain-driven bikes featuring inflated rubber tires and brakes. There were also tandem bicycles that allowed men and women to ride together, which was quite common during this period. Eventually tricycles, bikes with three wheels of which two were in the front, were used for transportation. Jamieson correctly makes the point that women from the early days of cycling were important consumers and riders of bicycles. Initially, owning and riding a bike was limited to the upper classes, irrespective of sex, but as bicycle production became increasingly industrialized in different countries before and after the First World War, prices decreased and the bike could be every man's and woman's property. For a more technological review of the development of the bicycle, Gert Engström's *Älskade cykel, 1800-2000* (Beloved bike; 2004) is recommended.

The main part of Jamieson's study concerns the fact that the new-found ease of transportation brought about by the invention and development of the bicycle from the 1880s onwards, gave rise to a new literary genre – bicycle travelogues. Jamieson's historic study is based on available source material and a very comprehensive review and presentation of literature and articles on cycling trips around the world, but especially in the US and the UK, by a number of authors. It certainly was and still is a great thing to do, biking far and wide alone or with friends or family, which many intellectuals

have done throughout history. Early on, the need for accommodation for long distance cyclists became obvious, and hotels opened up along popular trails. It may be added that several Swedish companies such as Merlot Travel and Prima Travel now organize bike trips in Europe, and especially in France, Italy and Spain. Cross-country cycling is still very popular and is now spreading across the world. Cycling holidays have become fashionable, and for many preferable to spending their summer vacation on the beach.

Professor Jamieson himself is obviously an avid long distance cyclist and he has covered vast stretches, such as across the United States. He is thus well suited to analyze and understand all these stories about bicycle trips written by other intellectuals over the years. He emphasizes the importance of cycling for children and young people, but adds that there has been some criticism of cycling in the United States, where the car is often a priority. He believes that motoring gives freedom, but also a certain social isolation when travelling far – as opposed to cycling, which is a much more social activity given the open air and slow speed mode of travelling, so that cyclists meet other riders and all sorts of people on their journeys.

Of all the hundreds of writers Jamieson has studied and presents in the book, he particularly points out the following three: the couple Elizabeth (née Robins) and Joseph Pennell, and Thomas Stevens; they all chronicled their trips during the period from 1878 to 1887: he calls them “the pioneers”. The Pennells, and their adventures, appear in the next chapter as well, which covers the subsequent period 1888–1894, “The Early Years”, when also Frank Lentz and Annie Londonderry are presented. In that period, stories about bicycle touring in Asia and Europe are included. During “The Golden Age” of long distance cycling, 1895–1899, cycling had become a global phenomenon and Jamieson includes cycling stories from for instance Africa and Asia.

In the penultimate chapter, “Sharing the Road”, the time period 1901–1961 is focused, during which roads are gradually improved and cycling has conquered the world. The bicycle country France as well as the British Isles are introduced, and the author includes literary cyclist such as F.W. Bockett and Bernard Newman in his narrative. He also discusses and presents the Danish cyclist Kai Thorenfeldt’s truly remarkable bike ride around the world. Arriving at the sixth and last chapter, “Renaissance”, Jamieson focuses primarily the differences between post-1960 and the preceding periods in terms of technology –improvements of the gear and brake systems, but also materials and suchlike. Moreover, based on his vast knowledge of the field, he points to a major difference, namely the involvement of women

in ever greater numbers and thus more women's bicycle stories. He refers to Bettina Selby, Anne Mustoe and Jane Schnell, whose stories provide new and interesting insights into long distance cycling and its culture.

Duncan Jamieson has performed a well-designed and comprehensive study, and in his book he draws attention to the fact that long distance cycling has been going on for centuries, and continues to attract new generations of cyclists. The bicycle is a global means of transportation and it's gaining ever more popularity; just lately I heard that biking is progressing in Colombia. During the interwar and the postwar periods in Sweden, for example, many would bicycle to their summer holiday resorts. From my own upbringing I know that both women and men bicycled from Stockholm to Dalarna (some 270 kilometers) for midsummer celebrations.

In his closing chapter Jamieson summarizes the study with his own analytical conclusions, partly by emphasizing what is pointed out in the extensive cycling literature, as follows:

From the beginning, the reasons for the ride vary from cyclist to cyclist but fall within certain general categories. Like Thomas Stevens, bicyclists traveled for the adventure and the notoriety. Elizabeth and Joseph Pennell rode to their work. Anne Mustoe loved traveling, and the bicycle seemed the perfect vehicle.

Despite the technological advances people still turn to the cycle for the same reasons. Thomas Stevens set out on his the around-the-world adventure. Further, nearly all cyclists mention the healthy exercise gained through miles of cycle touring. Elizabeth Pennell's words from 1890 are as true today: 'The world is one great book of beauty and romance; and on your cycle you can gradually master it, chapter by chapter, volume by volume'.

How very true, and well put. It's easy to understand why Jamieson was affected when he read her book.

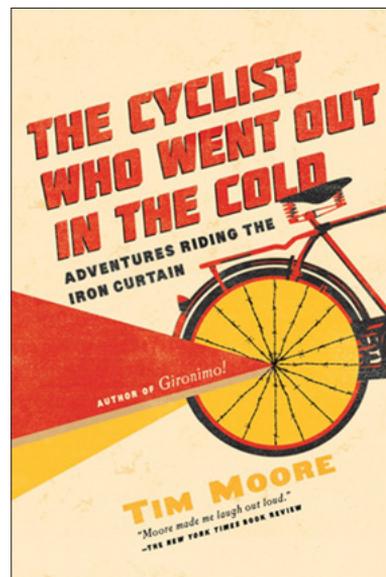
In short, the sport of cycling with all its doping problems over the years, is but one part of cycling in and between different countries. In my younger days I was a competitive cyclist, and I never fail to follow the Tour de France on TV or on-site. But nowadays I do long distance cycling myself every summer, in France and Italy. Traveling by bicycle offers various and useful experiences. You exercise in a highly pleasant way. The cultural experiences are manifold and very rewarding. Duncan R. Jamieson has brought all this to light in his study of cycling travelogues in this highly readable book that also features photographs from the 1880s up to the modern day, illustrating the development of the cycle through history.

You read mostly about competitive cycling here on idrottsforum.org, but it is obvious that sport is just one side of the bicycle coin. The other side is recreational long distance cycling, which is gaining renewed popularity of late. But let's not forget the all-important everyday bicycle commuting – to and from work or school; versatility is the bicycle's star attribute. (Copyright © Bill Sund 161005)

Combining History, Geography and Politics with a 20 inch Shopping Bicycle

English journalist Tim Moore is the author of two earlier cycling books (*French Revolutions: Cycling the Tour de France* (2001) and *Gironnino: Riding the Very Terrible 1914 Tour of Italy* (2013)). When the earliest cyclists pioneered routes through Europe and the United States, some of them such as Land's End to John O'Groats became iconic routes for both racing and travel in the slow lane. Other, newer rides are connected to historic events; in the United States the Bicentennial Trail, or in Eastern Europe the collapse of Communism which became the basis for the Iron Curtain Trail. Similar to the rides and riders featured in *The Self-Propelled Voyager*, Tim Moore traveled the Iron Curtain Trail in *The Cyclist Who Went Out in the Cold*.

Tim Moore, humorist and travel writer, has the ability to capture the humor as well as all the enchantment, joy and pain involved in long distance bicycle travel. In 2002 he rode the route of the Tour de France, which resulted in *French Revolutions*; twelve years later he followed the 1914 Tour of Italy on a vintage bicycle with wooden wheels. This time he tackled the 10,000 kilometers (6,200 miles) of the Iron Curtain Trail, also known as EUROVELO 13. He went through twenty countries, fourteen of which are members of the EU, from Finland in the midst of



Tim Moore
**The Cyclist Who Went Out in
 the Cold: Adventures Riding
 the Iron Curtain**
 340 pages, hardcover.
 New York: Pegasus Books 2017
 ISBN 978-1-68177-299-8

winter's bitter cold to summer's oppressive heat in Bulgaria. Just to keep it in context he used a slightly modified 1967 East German MIFA 901, a one speed twenty inch, folding shopping bicycle popular in Cold War countries behind the Iron Curtain. To make the journey safer he fitted a better brake and a stronger bracket to his MIFA. He wanted to insure he could stop and also prevent the bicycle from collapsing as he rode. To make it a bit easier to pedal he also made it a two speed machine.

As with all good cycle travel writing he describes the people and places of interest as he moved along in the slow lane. Most people were incredulous first that he was traveling the route by bicycle, and even more so that he chose a shopping bicycle. Popular in the 1970s and 1980s, the East Germans built almost three million between 1967 and the end of the Cold War. People used them to go the few miles to the store and then back home with their purchases in the attached basket. Despite however much people may have disparaged the MIFA, and no matter how much it might have groaned and complained along the way, it (and its rider) never gave up. One highlight of the journey came after six weeks on the road when at a traffic light in Kolo-brzeg, Poland. A young man on a beat up mountain bike came alongside, looked Moore and his MIFA over, and when the light changed "he nodded, lofted a thumb, and offered a small smile of approval." It pleased Moore to meet someone who understood why he felt the need to undertake the journey in such an audacious fashion.

No two of the countries he rode through were the same. While he saw very few cars in desolate and isolated Finland—he notes the Finns have more saunas than automobiles—once in Russia he found himself constantly at the mercy of the automobile. His description of the traffic in St. Petersburg reminds this reader of Bernard Newman's experiences with motor cars in 1930s Paris. When Newman returned to his home in England after following the trail of his boyhood heroes, *The Three Musketeers*, by bicycle, he went to apply for a life insurance policy. When the company learned that he had bicycled through Paris traffic they waived the obligatory physical examination. Perhaps because Moore had just come from "a thousand miles of snowbound silence," he found St. Petersburg as unnerving as he "feared it would be, an insane Grand National of jockeying, twelve-lane boulevards."

This was not the first time Moore traveled through Eastern Europe. Shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union (and with it the Iron Curtain) he and his wife toured many of these same places in a beat up old Volvo. He intersperses reflections on this earlier journey and its perils, as well as the helpfulness of the people they met along the way. Now, more than two de-

cedes later his wife and son met him a few times along the route, exchanging clothes and offering some much appreciated physical connections to home.

Because he followed the Iron Curtain Trail, for which there is an interesting and readable route guide, Moore traveled through land depopulated. Today parts of it are national parks or forest reserves, which mean diverse flora and fauna not usually found in more developed areas. There were also constant reminders of the division between East and West—rusting guard towers, check points, and secret Soviet towns, all now abandoned. While most of the book is lighthearted, there are powerful pieces to remind readers how close the world came to a nuclear holocaust. The book is a thoughtful mixture of bicycle journeying and the history of the Cold War. Moore offers the reader an up close view of the Soviet era, including harrowing tales of escape. In keeping with Herbie Sykes, *The Race Against the Stazi*, the story of East German cyclist Dieter Wiedemann, Moore recounts the thrilling escape of Alex Mitbauer, East German swimming champion. As he had been spotted talking to West German swimmers in 1968, the Stazi kept a close eye on him. However, a year later he jumped off a moving train, eluded his surveillance team and made his way to the Baltic resort town of Boltenhagen, where he studied the pattern of the giant searchlights that swept the beach. Turned off for one minute every hour, one August night, slathered in ersatz Vaseline with his medals safely tucked in his flippers Mitbauer swam for five hours to rest on buoy warmed by an on-board diesel generator. In the morning a West German ferry rescued him. This was not the end of his story; one morning after he started his car he discovered all the lug nuts had been loosened. Fearing kidnapping and repatriation he slept with the dresser jammed firmly against his door. His mother, still in Leipzig was regularly interrogated by the Stazi, and when she refused to denounce her son's existence she lost her job. Because of the difficulties associated with escaping from East Germany, many dissatisfied people would vacation near the Bulgarian Greek border with the hope of freedom. Eighty percent of those who attempted escape were captured and returned to the German Democratic Republic for sentencing.

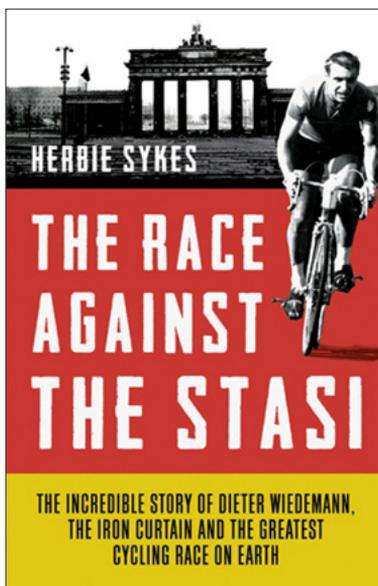
Tim Moore has written a fascinating story of the Iron Curtain Trail which will be of interest to any armchair travelers who enjoy adventure, history and humor rolled into one. Along the way he met many local people, was invariably treated with assistance and kindness, saw parts of Europe most will never visit, and shared a great deal of Cold War history. Depopulation over much of the territory through which he rode has resulted in places being frozen in time with little attention to modernity. He used a Garmin and

a few maps, but did very little planning. Basically it was get on the bike and start riding, which may well be the best way to approach a task such as this.

Escape to Freedom

English freelance journalist and sports historian as well as a cyclist himself, Herbie Sykes steps aside in *The Race Against the Stasi* to allow Dieter Wiedemann and the newspapers and individuals who covered his career in East German bicycle racing to tell the story. It was Wiedemann's bicycle that provided him the means to escape communism for a life in the West. Sykes has three earlier works on Italian cycle racing, including *The Eagle of Canavese: Franco Balmamion and the Giro d'Italia* (2008), *Maglia Rosa: Triumph and Tragedy at the Giro d'Italia* (2011), and *Coppi: Inside the Legend of Campionissimo* (2012). Though not as famous as the Tour de France, Vuelta a Espana and Giro d'Italia make up cycling's three, three week Grand Tours.

The first point impressed upon us in the research seminar I took in my Master of Arts in history was to present the fruits of my research, not the research itself, a point Professor Leach returned to repeatedly throughout the semester. I am sometimes more successful at this than other times, but I don't believe I've ever gone as far as presenting the research rather than the fruits as Herbie Sykes does in *The Race Against the Stasi*. He offers the briefest of introductions, followed by short descriptions of the cast of characters and then completely steps aside for the next 371 pages. The story unfolds as recounted by the players, which includes local papers and press reports, and the German Democratic Republic's secret police, the Stasi. This is followed by a brief conclusion which brings the story to a close.



Herbie Sykes
**The Race Against the Stasi:
The Incredible Story of Dieter
Wiedemann, The Iron Curtain
and The Greatest Cycling
Race on Earth**
400 pages, inb.
London: Aurum Press 2014
ISBN 978-1-78131-308-4

Dieter Wiedemann was born in 1941 in Floha, Nazi Germany, and when World War Two ended he and his family found themselves living in the Russian Zone, which became East Germany, known officially as the German Democratic Republic. The two major sports in post-war East Germany were football (soccer) and bicycle racing. For the latter, stage races dominated, the major one being a two week event, The Peace Race, begun in 1948. Riders began in both Prague and Warsaw, racing in both directions. In 1952 Berlin was added to the venue, and the race changed to a unidirectional format. Unlike the more famous Tour de France, only amateurs rode in the Peace Race, most of whom came from the countries of Eastern Europe, although some Western Europeans entered with the hope of attracting sufficient attention to earn a spot on a professional team and then race in the Tour de France.

The protagonist in this story is Dieter Wiedemann, who dreamed of becoming a bicycle racer by age 14. The next figure is Sylvia, a young woman who grew up in West Germany, officially the Federal Republic of Germany. She met Dieter when she went with her family to visit relatives who lived in Floha. They established a friendship based on letters sent back and forth. Dieter began racing, and attracted sufficient attention to ride in the Peace Race. The GDR hosted the first three stages, but Dieter lost all three, a major embarrassment for the East Germans. Nonetheless he established himself as a formidable rider and won a chance to compete for a spot on the 1964 Summer Olympics in Tokyo. The International Olympic Committee required the two halves of Germany present a unified team, which held its trials in West Germany. By this time Wiedemann had planned to defect to be with Sylvia. Therefore, he never joined the Communist Party, claiming himself to be apolitical. Because defection equaled treason, he kept his plans to himself, not sharing information with anyone. When the team reached West Germany, he simply went out on a training ride and never returned. The Stasi questioned other team members, his mechanics and trainers, and his family, all to no avail. Sylvia's family secreted him in a distant hotel for fear the Stasi might try to forcibly return him to the GDR. His family suffered for his criminal action, with his brother denied the opportunity to continue bicycle racing and his father fired from his job. All the prizes Dieter had won racing were withheld while the ones already distributed had to be returned, along with the bicycle he rode when he defected. Treated as a criminal, Dieter became increasingly alienated from his family.

Highly politicized, the East Germans constantly preached that the West determined to destroy it. Dieter found the transition from East to West Ger-

many difficult. Even though no language or culture barriers existed, the West proved to be as politicized, though in an entirely different fashion, as the East. Dieter and Sylvia married and he became a professional bicycle racer. He rode as a domestique for a German team in the 1967 Tour de France, and actually passed Tom Simpson, the British racing cyclist who died during the climb on Mont Ventoux from a drug overdose. Dieter's cycling career ended shortly after the 1967 Tour de France, but he did compete for a while in cross country skiing. He and Sylvia had three children. They visited East Germany, but he never reconciled with his family.

Sykes presentation is part spy drama, part love story, part political reflection and part bicycle race. These pieces are all intertwined, held together by Dieter Wiedemann's love for bicycle racing. While certainly interesting and overall readable, the Stasi documents are not exciting, written as bureaucratic reports, and it is hard to keep the minor characters straight. While the East Bloc nations claim the Peace Race to be the most significant event in the history of bicycle racing, the evidence does not support their claim. While a competent bicycle racer Wiedemann's career is not stellar. Still, the events surrounding his career and his defection are intriguing.

Riding in Circles Very Fast

I don't recall many instances of falling from my bicycle as a child, but I did have a fear of falling backward when riding on the top tube of a friend's bike. Fortunately, that never happened. As an adult I assert my right to the road, but only out of a sense of self preservation. While I enjoy a little friendly competition, I am anything but aggressive. I've only fallen a few times; except for a broken pelvis which resulted in little pain and after a few weeks no mobility limitations, none of these were of any consequence. Reggie McNamara, on the other hand, acquired multiple scars, concussions and broken bones during his long career in six day bicycle racing. McNamara was an exceptionally confrontational rider. Homan's biography of this legend is a labor of love as the author is himself a bicycle racer, though not on the six day circuit.

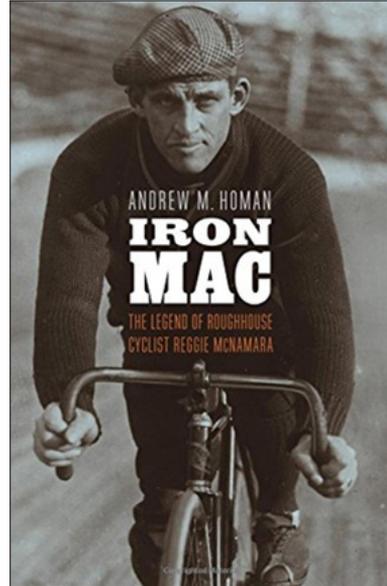
When considering early 20th century sports heroes, Reggie McNamara's name is not usually included, while Babe Ruth, Red Grange or Jim Thorpe among others, come immediately to mind. When considering the most popular sport of the first half of the 20th century, baseball is likely to be the one most named. However popular these athletes, and however many fans

and press coverage baseball had, popular memory overlooks the reality that six day bicycle racing and Australian born Reggie McNamara needs to be included in any top sports list. A bicycle racer himself, Andrew Homan has done a good job bringing both to the fore with his biography of Iron Mac, whose career spanned nearly three decades.

Both road and track cycling races had great popularity in the United States during the first half of the 20th century, with tens of thousands of fans coming out to watch stars from around the world compete. The first six day race in the United States was held in Madison Square Garden in 1891. With no racing on Sunday, teams of two riders would rack up two to three thousand miles on relatively small, highly banked indoor wooden tracks needing several laps to make a mile. Much of the time riders would lazily circle the track, singing,

joking or reading newspapers until a bell started a sprint where the speed would be increased to as much as thirty miles an hour while teams attempted a breakaway to gain a lap or more on the field. Throughout the course of the six days fans would offer a premium to lend some excitement. Once announced the riders would race to see who could win the lap and pick up the prize money. Other premiums were a regular part of the promoters' package adding to the amount of money riders could earn. In 1926, when Babe Ruth earned \$50,000 with the New York Yankees, and jockey Earl Sande \$100,000, the thirty-nine-year-old McNamara took home \$75,000, one of the highest paid athletes at the time.

McNamara won his first road race at age 18 and then quickly realized if he turned pro he could make a decent living. Neither a gifted nor great sprinter, his phenomenal strength allowed him to sustain high speeds for long periods of time. He did well in road and track racing as well as pursuit rides, where riders would start at opposite sides of the track in an attempt to catch one another. In each type of race McNamara raced against the best



Andrew M. Homan
**Iron Mac: The Legend of
 Roughhouse Cyclist Reggie
 McNamara**

256 pages, hardcover.
 Lincoln, NE: University of
 Nebraska Press 2016
 ISBN 978-0-8032-5480-0

Australia had to offer, and soon realized he needed to journey to the United States. In Australia the six day races took place outdoors, riding on asphalt and grass. While they stopped riding during thunderstorms they rode in temperatures of more than 100 degrees and they rode through hailstorms. While bicycle racing, both road and track, took place around the world, at the turn of the twentieth century Newark, New Jersey was the epicenter. Here McNamara encountered his first indoor, steeply banked wooden track.

Reggie McNamara earned the sobriquet for his incredible ability to endure pain and injury that would have crippled lesser men. Throughout it he rarely stopped racing. In Melbourne, he crashed which resulted in a stomach abscess severe enough to keep him off the track for five hours; despite the injury he returned to racing and his team took third place. It was on his first training ride at Newark that he crashed, resulting in a fourteen inch gash on his right thigh which required hospitalization and multiple stitches. It was this injury that earned him the nickname "Iron Mac." Undoubtedly far more important to him, he fell in love with and married his nurse. Over the course of his career he rode in 122 six day races, completing in excess of 150,000 miles. He also sustained 180 injuries. He retired after he was knocked unconscious in December, 1935 on day two of a six day race in Buffalo, New York.

More than just a biography of Iron Mac, Homan includes a variety of fascinating facts about six day races. The Madison Square Garden track, for example, was built new for each race, sixty carpenters using 35,000 square feet of spruce lumber and nearly 87,000 nails. The races attracted the biggest names in American society, from politicians to actors to singers and gangsters, as well as tens of thousands of ordinary fans. It was not unusual to see Ty Cobb, Babe Ruth, Knute Rockne, Will Rogers, Bing Crosby or Al Capone at a race, and oftentimes such a big name celebrity would start the race. He offers brief biographies of many of the greatest names in six day racing, legends such as Alf Goulet, Cecil Walker, Harry Horan, Eddie Seufert, Bobby Walthour Sr. and Jr., Tom Eck, Floyd MacFarland, Frank Kramer, and Ernest and Hans Ort to mention a few. While he explains some of the strategies and rules that comprise six day races, clearer explanations in this regard would help. Specifically, how for example did a jam work, or what strategies did riders use to go up a lap or more on the field.

Homan includes sufficient detail to flesh out McNamara's personal life, which included a drinking problem that caused both financial and marital issues. It was on his return to race in Australia that alcohol abuse became serious, though he credited Alcoholics Anonymous with saving his life. For

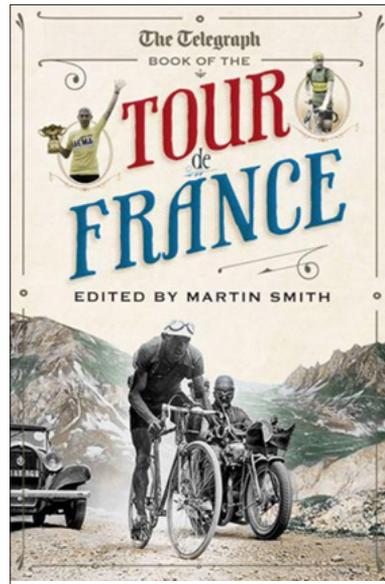
anyone interested in bicycle racing, and especially six day races this is a good read. While they are still popular in Europe, six day races faded in the United States during World War Two. Despite attempts to revive them in the 1950s they failed to catch on.

The English Perspective on a French Tradition

Even though The Tour de France has only occasionally included stages in England, the British are avid followers of what is the most grueling event in sports. In *The Telegraph Book of the Tour de France*, Martin Smith, ed., has culled from London's *Daily Telegraph* and *Sunday Telegraph* fascinating articles spanning the entire history of the world's most famous bicycle stage race.

A million plus people will be stretched out along the streets of Paris, or in the Alps or the Pyrenees, waiting for hours for a streak of color to flash by in a matter of seconds. Millions more around the world will also be watching this spectacle known as The Tour de France, undoubtedly the world's most demanding and grueling sporting event. Riding high performance bicycles at speeds most urban commuters would envy, packed tighter than NASCAR competitors, the peloton charges from point to point in day long stages over three weeks in July. That rider

with the fastest overall time is determined the winner, who gets millions in prize winnings and endorsements, along with the honor of wearing the coveted *Maillot Jaune*—the Yellow Jersey, a symbol of winning and endurance recognized the world over. In fact, the Yellow Jersey did not appear until 1919, when Tour organizer Henri Desgrange accepted the idea to dress the overall winner in a distinctive jersey. He chose yellow because it was the color of his newspaper which sponsored The Tour, *L'Auto*. Avid cyclist Desgrange founded his sporting paper to compete with the more established



Martin Smith (red)
**The Telegraph Book of the
 Tour de France**
 272 Pages, hft., Ill.
 London: Aurum Press 2012
 ISBN 978-1-84513-545-4

L'Auto, and then introduced The Tour to boost circulation. As might be expected, Tour coverage varies by locale. Founded in 1855, the London based *Telegraph* (*The Daily Telegraph* and *The Sunday Telegraph* are related publications which share stories but which have separate editorial staffs) has covered the Tour since its inception in 1903.

Following a brief introduction Smith, formerly an assistant sports editor at *The Daily Telegraph*, has culled the paper's archives to present a year by year history of The Tour and its outstanding riders. There are stories of triumph and heartbreak, stories of outstanding athletes who perform, without resorting to banned substances, seemingly superhuman feats, and stories of those who rose to the top only to fall because their victory was tainted by one banned substance or another.

Perhaps it's a sad commentary on The Tour specifically, or sports overall, or the human condition in general, but the seeming emphasis on drug use is disturbing. To those of us naïve enough to believe that just maybe Lance Armstrong won The Tour cleanly, it is sad to read Smith's introduction which focuses on drug use and then story after story of the drug busts, the failed drug tests, and the riders fallen from grace. At the same time, perhaps this makes the achievements of Eddie Merckx and Greg LeMond, to name just two, more impressive.

Overall, the joy of the book is the individual stories written as The Tour progresses. While certainly reading this from cover to cover is preferred, it is also a case of looking at the title of the article, deciding that's something of interest, delving into it and then moving on to find the next nugget. While there are a couple of long time Tour correspondents, who are outstanding, there are many different authors included. Here one has the chance to look into the genre of sports reporting through the lens of one iconic sporting event. While Smith has the advantage of picking the best, to be able to cover this and engage the reader day after day for three weeks demonstrates the best of sports reporting. To borrow the title of Armstrong's book about fighting cancer and winning The Tour, "It's not about the bike." Yes, you get a feeling for what it's like to hurtle down a curving mountain road at heart stopping speeds surrounded by dozens of bicyclists. You can feel the skin peeling off your extremities as you slide along the rough pavement after a fall. You sense the dogged determination as the bleeding riders remount and continue on without a second's thought. But more these are stories of human beings propelled along by a desire to achieve. Most of the riders will never wear the Yellow Jersey nor even win a stage, but they ride selflessly for the thrill of being a part of The Tour.

The strength of the book is the fascinating stories told in each of the articles. There one can learn a great deal about individual riders, about the protests riders staged at various times against the drug testing or the treatment of riders, and about acts of violence and sabotage that have taken place from The Tour's inception. As the paper is British, it comes as no surprise that while *The Telegraph* covered the first Tour, little interest existed until Englishman Tom Simpson rode in the 1960s. Sadly he was one of four men to die in competition, his 1967 death climbing Mont Ventoux in part due to drug use. The first Tour participant to die during the race was French racer Adolphe Heliere who drowned during a rest day. In 1935, Spanish racer Francisco Cepeda died plunging down a ravine, and Fabio Casartelli crashed at fifty-five miles an hour descending the Col de Portet d'Aspet in 1995.

In addition to the Yellow Jersey, there are articles about the polka dot jersey for the best climber, the green jersey for the rider with the most points, and the white jersey for the youngest (under 26) rider leading. My favorite, however, is the red lantern, the designation for the slowest rider. While it was for a while something to be coveted, The Tour directors determined to make the race more interesting the slowest rider would be dropped. As a result, the red lantern changes hands regularly. Given the rigor of the race, even the last man deserves much credit, even if the brooms sweep him up at the end of the day and the red lantern passes to another rider.

Beyond those interested in bicycling in general and bicycle racing in particular, this edited collection will intrigue anyone who enjoys excellent writing and dramatic sports reporting.

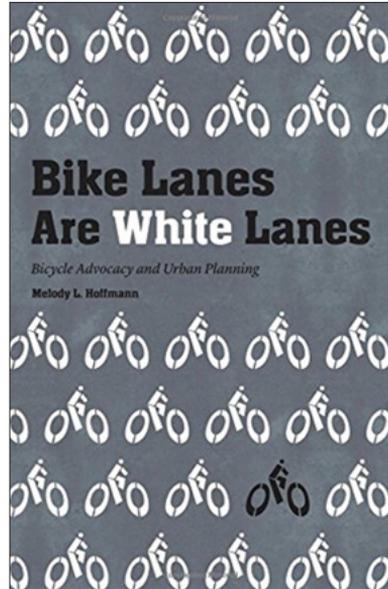
Sharing the Road with All People and Modes of Transportation

Bicycles are increasingly a part of the urban landscape; in *Bike Lanes are White Lanes* Melody Hoffman examines the race and class issues raised. Bicycle lanes are often seen as favoring younger, white, upwardly mobile middle class riders to the detriment of neighborhood residents of color. The bicycle is much more accepted in Europe and the Far East. In the United States, however, all too often bicycles, like people of color or in poverty, are marginalized. Where the earlier books are more traditionally focused on a leisure or sporting activity, or have been examining the historical development of the bicycle, Hoffman is taking an activist approach to enlighten

readers regarding discrimination. Hoffman's call to alert cyclists and city planners to the impact and consequences of their activities may reduce tension between those who like Tim Moore cycle innocently through their space.

In the immortal words of Malvina Reynolds, higher education is good at putting students (and faculty) in "Little Boxes." While we speak glowingly of the value of the liberal arts and a core curriculum, students (and all too often their advisors) seek the easiest path to avoid that general education requirement that might broaden their horizons. The end result is educated people knowing more and more about less and less. This is certainly true of my department, which takes as its mission the goal of having students "think like historians." More to the point, my colleagues are currently debating a proposal to increase the major by fifteen percent. While I try to instill a sense of the importance of history in all students who wander into my classes, I believe that unless their goal is graduate school in history, they might be better served by taking additional courses in other disciplines rather than more courses in history.

Melody Hoffman's *Bike Lanes are White Lanes* flies in the face of "Little Boxes" thinking. She combines bicycle advocacy, neighborhood history, gentrification and black lives matter through case studies of Milwaukee, Portland and Minneapolis. She examines how bicycle lanes all too often appear at least to be precursors of gentrification. She notes that despite the League of American Bicyclists statistics that African Americans represent one of the fastest growing segments of bicycling, they are still a very small percentage of riders. Over hundreds of organized rides, I rarely see many bicyclists of color. The one exception would be the Great Five Boro Bike Ride, held each May in New York City, but even there African Americans make up a small percentage of the thirty thousand participants.



Melody L. Hoffmann

**Bike Lanes Are White Lanes:
Bicycle Advocacy and Urban
Planning**

210 pages, hardcover.

Lincoln, NE: University of

Nebraska Press 2016

ISBN 978-0-8032-7678-9

Bike Lanes is as much about urban planning, gentrification and attempts at making cities more livable as it is about bicycling. Clearly, the more people who bicycle to do light shopping, or to commute to work, or to school represent that many fewer cars on the already overcrowded, congested city streets. However, as she points out, it is not usually people of color in the hood who are the ones on the cycles, but rather people passing through on their way from Point A to Point B. A bicycle lane tends to make the neighborhood friendlier to young, white, upwardly mobile professionals who bicycle by choice, not necessity. If the poorer residents ride a bicycle it is because they cannot afford a car and all its associated costs. To them, the question is “why bicycle if you have the means to drive”? Those in the hood who do bicycle do so by necessity, not for leisure, and they are generally invisible to the cycling culture and society at large. These invisible cyclists are the poor, African Americans and illegal immigrants. They are only invisible because the mainstream bicycle culture ignores them, creating an “us vs. them” environment.

Urban bicycling advocacy, according to Hoffman, is connected among other ideas to radical, environmental politics. Bicycling for transportation is a counter culture activity, which means that now it’s the young, upwardly mobile whites who work in cubicles who are getting the attention. Not everyone who rides a bicycle does so by choice rather than necessity, but it is those who ride by choice who are pushing for bike lanes. Rather than bicycle lanes making it safer for cyclists, the poor want an automobile to escape the city.

The first of three case studies involves a ride that began in 2008 with a couple of hundred participants and has caught on so dramatically that now approximately five times that number participate. Repeating five mile loops through the Riverwest neighborhood in Milwaukee on the last weekend in July, mostly males on high end bicycles and the occasional bicycle messenger are joined by casual riders of both genders on big box store bicycles. Riders stop at four mandatory checkpoints while completing each loop. The winner is the one who completes the most laps in twenty-four hours. Riders can earn bonus laps by stopping at bonus checkpoints, which might entail a visit to a tattoo parlor, playing softball or attending a yoga class. Residents of this integrated working to middle class neighborhood began the event to build community spirit and fight the image of the neighborhood as crime ridden.

Portland, Oregon’s Albina district is the focus for the second case study. A bike lane connecting a distant neighborhood populated by young urban

professionals with the downtown was proposed to traverse the historically black neighborhood. The residents saw this as a means for young white people to bicycle through their area on the way to downtown without offering the Albina residents any advantage. Obviously, not all of Portland is as enamored of bicycles as the rest of country believes. A major concern involved the fear of gentrification, which would result in high taxes and the displacement of both neighborhood businesses and the residents who frequent them.

Minneapolis is the last case study. Because bicycles are representative of the creative class, and because such individuals pick a city to live in based on its amenities and then find a job there, Minneapolis has made greenways and bicycle paths a high priority. While to the city, these clearly are an advantage both economically and aesthetically, they do cause displacement. An abandoned railroad corridor was used by homeless and drug dealers, but its revitalization as a bike path has caused those people to move on. This type of green development is environmental gentrification. Since these amenities are available to all, and since they create new business opportunities, the city's position is favorable because this pulls up those in the service class. One such opportunity might be the bike share programs that are proliferating in American cities; unfortunately access is generally limited to those with credit cards, a clear disadvantage for the urban poor.

Conclusion

It is safe assumption that most if not all people reading this know how to ride a bicycle, a skill that even if dormant for decades is never lost. Like me, you probably learned to ride a two-wheeler, either with training wheels or someone running alongside holding the back of the saddle while you pedaled. Once having mastered the skill of balancing you, like me, escaped the immediate environment, traveling further and further afield, free and independent. Whether explicit or implied, all these monographs have that theme of independence. Obviously Wiedemann sought escape from communist domination, using his bicycle and his skill to make a life in the West. Guroff and I both explore how the bicycle offered the ability to travel independently to an ever increasing number of people. Tim Moore reflects on the fall of communism which, to those of us in the West, led to greater independence for the people of Eastern Europe. He also travels independently on his shopping bicycle to visit places he saw decades earlier. Homan's biography explores the bicycle as a means to independence to McNamara while Smith

writes how *The Telegraph's* coverage of the Tour de France offered freedom from the drudgery of daily life as readers followed the action. In each of the cities examined Hoffman shows the readers how the bicycle offers opportunities to escape the car culture.

Another common thread is movement. One learns very quickly that unless the rider is proficient with the track stand, a stationary bicycle is hazardous. Movement is necessary for balance as well as achieving one's goals. Tim Moore rode the length of the Iron Curtain after it fell while earlier Dieter Wiedemann crossed it to live in freedom. Guroff explains how the bicycle offered the opportunity for workers to move from the city to the suburbs. McNamara moved from Australia to New York to compete while the people discussed in my book used to bicycle to move about the globe. Hoffman explores the tension between residents and the cyclists who move through their contested spaces. Smith's selections of *Telegraph's* articles recount how the peloton moved around France.

Finally, all these books address the human desire to overcome obstacles even against all odds. Guroff offers several examples of this, from the Wright brothers to bicycle messengers. I speak from personal experience regarding this as I have ridden tens of thousands of miles to achieve personal goals. When planning the route of an Earth Day bicycle ride, with another rider we checked the route on a March day that began sunny and warm. Before we could return home we rode through rain, sleet, freezing rain and snow. These little vicissitudes pale in comparison to what some of the riders I wrote about experienced. While nowhere near as difficult as Moore's ride nor as dangerous as Wiedemann's, my activity does offer confirmation for what they endured. If I've never suffered injuries similar to McNamara's, as a marshal on the Five Boro Tour I've directed fellow cyclists around fallen riders with scrapes, broken bones and possible concussions. *The Telegraph* articles celebrate those cyclists who conquered challenges to be able to ride in the world's most celebrated bicycle race. Hoffman offers insights into ways to overcome the obstacles that make bike lanes white lanes.

These are only a handful of recent publications focusing on different aspects of cycling and the cycle's place in society. While interest in the cycle, how it impacts society and how humans relate to it has ebbed and flowed over the last century and one half, there is now and hopefully for the foreseeable future a continual expansion of interest.