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Jockeying for Position: Horse Racing in New Orleans, 1865-1920

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JOCKEYING FOR POSITION: HORSE RACING IN NEW ORLEANS, 1865-1920

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

in

The Department of History

by
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ABSTRACT

From 1865 to 1920, Thoroughbred horse racing matured in Louisiana, developing into a national sport shaped by the processes of modernization, professionalization, and reform. Before the onset of the Civil War, the leaders of Southern thoroughbred horse racing came from the planter elite who used African-American slave horsemen in shows of “amateur” recreation. Combining upper-class recreation with lower and middle-class entertainment, horse racing was a performance of social power. The Civil War devastated the Louisiana turf, scattering horses and men – but sportsmen proposed that post-war racing would help the state recover. The once-independent New Orleans turf joined an interconnected network of major tracks as the professional turfmen adopted national racing ideals and standards. Thanks to the turfmen’s efforts to promote and democratize the sport, New Orleans became the national capital of winter racing.

The professional class leading the Louisiana turf reflected the fusion of gambling-as-business with a larger organizational transformation that was occurring. The modernization of the track brought more lucrative prospects to everyone in racing, including black horsemen and professional gamblers. After emancipation, black horsemen prospered on the track; their continued success in a meritocratic profession allowed them to earn a significant salary, widespread acclaim, and social mobility. But the equality espoused by some of the black horsemen troubled white turfmen who then enacted widespread informal policies leading to the national subordination and exclusion of African-American jockeys. Emphasizing gambling also piqued Progressive and moral reformers seeking to cleanse the tracks of an ostensibly undesirable element. The means to reform was uncertain, and a debate between regulation and prohibition arose in the Louisiana Legislature. In the end, the legislature passed laws that banned

racetrack gambling and, effectively, shut down the New Orleans tracks. When Louisiana gambling laws were repealed, a decline in public interest meant fewer tracks reopened, leading to increased competition for mounts, and no opportunity for black horsemen thanks to Louisiana's solidification of Jim Crow. The convergence of racial ideology, economic interest, and moral reform all fundamentally influenced the reemergence and decline of thoroughbred horse racing in New Orleans from Reconstruction through the Progressive Era.

INTRODUCTION

Isaac Murphy was the preeminent jockey – black or white – in the United States at the close of the nineteenth-century. He won three Kentucky Derbies in the 1880s and 1890s and earned substantial fortune and fame for himself. He came to prominence during a time when the racetrack had become an important national recreation, as professional sportsmen sought to earn social prestige and profit on the turf. These sportsmen successfully used principles of modernization and democratization to transform the turf from its pre-modern antebellum roots into a network of interconnected national tracks. Sportsmen, turfmen, horsemen, and gamblers alike all shared in the profits of the track. The economic changes occurring at the track brought with them a lucrative opportunity for skilled black horsemen to earn fame, fortune, and glory. Isaac Murphy was the greatest of them and his success “fueled hopes of the coming of a racially integrated America, founded on the idea that equality was entailed in the freedom attained at emancipation.”¹ The hope embodied by the black horsemen struck fear into the hearts of white turfmen. Murphy was a victim of the backlash – first, he was discredited through an informal smear campaign; then, the economics of the sport dictated the end of his career as horse owners were not willing to risk their investments on the chance that Murphy might endanger their horses. Through a variety of means between 1890 and 1910, from informal policies within the racing institutions, to state political reform and overt violence, the public face of the black turfmen – the jockeys – were run off the track.

Sports journalist Bill Rhoden considers Murphy’s experience to be the progenitor of a phenomenon he terms the “Jockey Syndrome,” that is, the “changing of the rules to fit a need –

¹ Katherine C. Mooney, *Race Horse Men: How Slavery and Freedom Were Made at the Racetrack* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 196.

the need to maintain control in the face of a perceived challenge to white supremacy.”² The preeminent riders of the postbellum period were slowly shut out from the sport through a “series of maneuvers to facilitate racist outcomes, including the taking away of previously granted rights and the diluting of access through coercive power and force.”³ Rhoden argues that the Jockey Syndrome has always been at the forefront of the American sports establishment. Whenever black athletes found success, the rules of the game were amended, “tilting the ostensibly level playing field of sport away from equal opportunity and toward white supremacy.”⁴

The elimination of the black jockeys was only one of the major social forces that transformed racing in Louisiana after the Civil War. During these years, the modernization of horse racing brought about the development of a new middle-class of professional sportsmen who, after usurping power from the old planter-aristocracy, democratized the nature of the sport, bringing New Orleans racing in line with national standards and reintegrating the city into the

² William C. Rhoden, *Forty Million Dollar Slaves: The Rise, Fall, and Redemption of the Black Athlete* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006), 68.

³ Rhoden, 68.

⁴ Rhoden, 68.; Rhoden later adds that the expected outcomes of these changes haven’t always been achieved. In many cases, they completely backfired due to greater innovation by black athletes. One example can be found as an addendum to the previous basketball examples. Due to the dominance of African-American centers and forwards in professional basketball, the American Basketball Association (ABA) instituted the three-point line in 1967 as a way to encourage more white guards. ABA Commissioner George Mikan stated that the three-point line “will give the smaller player a chance to score and open up the defense to make the game more enjoyable for the fans.” Instead though, the new rule led to an influx of African-American long-range shooters. “4-Point Play Gets Approved by ABA,” *The Miami News*, July 11, 1967.

American economy.⁵ The ideas of freedom espoused by black horsemen alarmed the white turfmen who strengthened their national reunification through the subordination of African-Americans. The professional sportsmen needed to ensure order and efficiency on the track to sustain high profits. The role of the professional sportsman and the centrality of gambling to the new Louisiana track generated opposition from two new forces, religious and political reformers, together, encompassing two strains of Progressive Era reform. The perception of impropriety and dishonesty that was imputed to professional sportsmen and gamblers, along with the racial discord and threats to white supremacy following the success of the black horsemen, drew the attention of local and national moral reformers. After much debate over the merits of regulation versus prohibition, Louisiana outlawed horse racing in 1908, solidifying the newly-redrawn color line and restructuring the horse racing infrastructure and racing interests before the tracks reopened fully in 1919. A cloud of anxieties enveloped the white middle-class men of New Orleans as they tried to navigate their position in the New South, confronting their insecurities regarding race, class, and gender in the face of modernity and progress. In examining the debates over control of horse racing and American leisure interests in general, this study will reveal the convergence of racial ideology, economic interest, and moral reform as the fundamental influences on the reemergence and decline of thoroughbred horse racing in New Orleans from Reconstruction through the Progressive Era.

⁵ The nature of democratization on the turf does not directly give more power to those who were not part of the elite. It was a democratization of access, as policies enacted by the professional sportsmen sought to attract more people to the track by making it cheaper and more accessible. This did, however, confer some measure of influence to the track goers because the jockey clubs were dependent on income from gate receipts and gambling money to keep the prize amounts high. More lucrative purses meant that the clubs could attract higher-quality stables, and the increased competition would ideally attract more people to the track. A decline in attendance, alternatively, leads to a decline in purse value and lesser-quality horses at the track.

The historiographical background of this project and its theoretical models can be located in the field of sports history. The New Social historians of the late 1960s were instrumental in the development of sports history as an independent field. The North American Society for Sport History was created in 1972, but most of the initial scholarship was focused on baseball or biography. It was not until the 1980s that incisive studies on American sports began to appear. Stephen Riess captures the early state of the field in his 1990 article on “The New Sport History”; he identified three main models that serve to explain the rise of organized sport in the period from 1850 to 1920.⁶ The first is the modernization model, promoted by Melvin Adelman and Allen Guttman, which claims that modern sports are inherently different from those of earlier periods because of the introduction of the Protestant work ethic and the new methods of bureaucracy, rationality, and order that dominated the period.⁷ The second model can be found in Benjamin Rader’s work where he argues that the process of organization was the result of industrial capitalism in the evolving urban environment.⁸ The third model emphasizes the centrality of urbanization to the rise of organized sport. Though the other two models do touch on urban evolution, this third model, most notably advocated by Riess, focuses on sport as both a product of urbanization and a factor in the process of urbanization.⁹ The physical structure of the

⁶ Steven A. Reiss, “The New Sport History,” *Reviews in American History* 18, no. 3 (September 1990): 311-325.

⁷ See Melvin L. Adelman, “The First Modern Sport in America: Harness Racing in New York City, 1825-1870,” *Journal of Sport History* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1981): 5-32.; Allen Guttman, *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978).

⁸ See Benjamin G. Rader, *American Sports: From the Age of Folk Games to the Age of Televised Sports*, 3rd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1996 [1983]).

⁹ See Stephen A. Riess, *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

city, its social organization, and its value system all combined to influence the organization, rationalization, and professionalization of sport.

This study will fuse Melvin Adelman's modernization framework with Riess's model stressing the processes of urbanization in both producing and being influenced by organized sport. Adelman's process of modernization focus on two ideal sporting types – the modern and the premodern – and how they are both characterized by the absence or presence of bureaucracy, rationality, and order. These sporting types mesh the new social history with the organizational school, characterized by Louis Galambos, in assuming that “some of the most (if not the single most) important changes which have taken place in modern America have centered about a shift from small-scale, informal, locally or regionally oriented groups to large-scale, national, formal organizations.”¹⁰ As such, Adelman identifies six characteristics that define the ideal sporting types: organization, rules, competition, role differentiation, public information, and statistics and records. The premodern sport was one that was generally unorganized, governed by simple unwritten rules; it garnered little national attention, with nearly non-existent records and only limited local public information; and it had little role differentiation between players and spectators. As the factors of modernization and urbanization transformed the sport towards the modern sporting ideal, these attributes changed too, reflecting the modern bureaucratic system of order. Formal organizations arose, distinguishing themselves between the local, regional, and national level; rules of the sport were standardized and implemented by the national body; national competition superimposed itself on local contests, giving contestants the ability to earn national reputations; achievements are recorded and then published and reported regularly by

¹⁰ Louis Galambos, “The Emerging Organizational Synthesis in Modern American History,” *Business History Review* 44, no. 3 (Autumn 1970): 280.

both local newspapers and national sporting journals; and a system of high role differentiation developed, creating the emergence of specialized professions.¹¹ The ideals of bureaucracy, rationality, and order were important to the growth of the jockey clubs of the postbellum period, but the clubs themselves also had a significant role in the processes of urbanization.

Another concept that is just as important to the development of sport is that of the “sportsman.” Americans of the nineteenth century believed two types of sportsmen existed: the amateur and the professional. The “amateur sportsman” played for a love of competition, as a rite of honor, or out of a sense of pride; the “professional sportsman” meanwhile participated in the sports world mainly in search of profit. The antebellum planter aristocracy of Louisiana had the time and capital necessary to indulge in horse racing without any financial motive, but the postbellum turfmen saw the New Orleans tracks as their opportunity to strike it rich. The modernizing turfman was always present in Southern racing, but it was not until the diminished power of the planter aristocracy in the postbellum years that he was able to carve out a niche in the leadership of the sport.

Historians have only recently begun to explore these socio-cultural developments in the sphere of American horse racing.¹² While most contemporary Americans pay little attention to

¹¹ Adelman, 6.

¹² The type of horse racing investigated in this thesis is thoroughbred flat racing, which was by far the most prevalent and popular type of racing on Southern tracks. Quarter-horse racing has a longer history in the South, especially in the colonial period, but the quality was generally lesser than that of thoroughbred racing. Flat racing is a running race where multiple ridered horses gallop down a straight or oval track. It differs from steeplechase and hurdling where horses jump over obstacles. It also differs from trotting and harness racing where horses pull a vehicle and driver behind them while they pace or trot instead of gallop. Harness-racing also used standard-bred horses, or trotters, instead of thoroughbreds – the thoroughbred being distinct by its pure-bred lineage. These other types of racing were popular in some areas, but they had neither the history nor the impact that thoroughbred racing did in American society. G. Clark Cummings, “The Language of Horse Racing,” *American Speech* 30, no. 1 (Feb. 1955): 17-18.

horse racing beyond the “Fastest Two Minutes in Sports,” the Kentucky Derby, for many Americans in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the world of the turf was an essential component of their life, more than just a leisure activity. Baseball is often referred to as “the national game,” but during the nineteenth century and through the turn of the twentieth century, horse racing held dominance in the American mind.¹³ For many Americans, the track was an “institution that defined who they were or who they wished to become.”¹⁴ It was an institution that connected Americans of all social classes – as the mainstay of an elite gentry; as a status symbol for the middle-class who aspired to become elites; as a place for the common man to opine on the merits of a horse and wager money to back his faith – for any man’s betting money was equal to another’s. Racial harmony was also evident at the track for much of its early history, though slavery and black subordination were still present and necessary for the antebellum turfmen to maintain social order.

Only in the past two decades have studies emerged asserting that horse racing was not just a leisure activity for Americans, but an institution that defined class and race relations. Edward Hotaling’s *The Great Black Jockeys* is an informative evaluation of how African American men succeeded in the realm of horse racing. Unfortunately, his analysis is minimal, though he lays the ground work by exhuming the lives of these men who have been relegated to the dustbin of history.¹⁵ The most recent of these studies is Katherine Mooney’s *Race Horse*

¹³ Peter Morris, *A Game of Inches: The Story Behind the Innovations that Shaped Baseball*, Rev. ed. (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2010), 564. See also, George B. Kirsch, *Baseball in Blue and Gray: The National Pastime during the Civil War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003). Baseball at this time is only the “national game” in terms of the growing nationalist spirit surrounding it.

¹⁴ Mooney, 3.

¹⁵ Edward Hotaling, *The Great Black Jockeys: The Lives and Times of the Men who Dominated America’s First National Sport* (Rocklin, CA: Prima Publishing, 1999).

Men: How Slavery and Freedom Were Made at the Racetrack. Mooney examines the same men that Hotaling does, but she provides remarkable analysis in which she identifies the relationships between thoroughbred horse racing, politics, black labor, and race relations. She fulfills what historian Amy Bass would call an ideal sports history by arguing that the track society, especially in the south, helped shape the direction of American politics on issues of race.¹⁶ Mooney discusses how southern turfmen “believed in the necessity of hierarchy to make a great and modern United States and how hard they were willing to work to protect social divisions and inequalities.”¹⁷ Both Hotaling and Mooney’s works deal exclusively with horse racing, but references to the importance of horse racing as both a leisure activity and a society institution can be found on the peripheries of many other works of historical scholarship.¹⁸

Most of the primary sources used in this study are newspaper accounts of the races. These papers typified Adelman’s framework of modernization in how they reported on horse racing. The antebellum newspapers generally only reported on the local races, and at that time, only a handful of national sporting journals existed, most notably *Spirit of the Times*. The proliferation

¹⁶ In a roundtable in the *Journal of American History*, Amy Bass wrote that one of the problems in bestowing legitimacy on sports historians is the “old-school” style of sports history that solely incorporated the sports figures and institutions into the existing historical narrative. Instead, the historian should strive to show how socio-cultural developments were *created* in the realm of sports. Amy Bass, “State of the Field: Sports History and the ‘Cultural Turn,’” *Journal of American History* 101, no. 1 (June 2014): 154.

¹⁷ Mooney, 6.

¹⁸ See Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*, 25th Anniv. Ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).; Winthrop Jordan, *Tumult and Silence at Second Creek: An Inquiry into a Civil War Slave Conspiracy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996).; Edwin Adams Davis and William Ransom Hogan, *The Barber of Natchez* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973). Oddly though, any and all mentions of New Orleans horse racing, or even sports in general, seem to be missing from Louise McKinney’s *New Orleans: A Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

of newspapers after the Civil War and the introduction of a dedicated sporting page to most papers fed the voracious appetites of Americans to consume news of the turf across the nation. While some newspapers still shared stories, the vast increase in individual reporting by newspapers and periodicals meant that there were multiple accounts of the major horse races of the American turf. The approach of these writers to the notion of athleticism and athletes differed depending on the time and place. The early articles equated the wisdom of the owners in breeding and training horses with the athleticism exhibited by the horses.¹⁹ Other accounts discussed the athletic abilities of the horses in an anthropomorphized manner. In these accounts, the horses instinctively knew what to do and were capable of strategizing to achieve victory.²⁰ Jockeys were rarely mentioned in early accounts, and only the most successful of the riders made it into later stories.

It should also be noted that sources from black horsemen are much less common than those by white writers about black horsemen. But the idea of finding objective truths about black horsemen in accounts by white turfmen is much less important than what these accounts say about how white turfmen viewed their relationship and their belief in the necessity of black horsemen's talent and continued subordination. Recollections and reports of the black horsemen after emancipation highlighted their attempts to define freedom on the track. These men had a personal stake in creating this definition, as most of them had either learned their skills during slavery or were apprentices of riders who had. Some later writers conversely believed that the turf had been a trap for black men, removing them from the black community and connecting their fortunes with those of white turfmen. Arna Bontemps 1931 novel *God Sends Sunday*

¹⁹ Even though the day-to-day training would be performed by slaves.

²⁰ Even though the horses would generally be saddled by slave jockeys.

features a black horseman who “believed that kind of pride pulled unwary young men into a degrading dependence on rich white horse owners and a consequent adoption of white standards of value and white-sanctioned forms of self-destruction.”²¹ This view would not be shared by the white turfmen during and after Reconstruction, who were beginning to sense the pride that was generated by the African-Americans of the track. It was safe and acceptable for white turfmen to allow black horsemen during slavery when whites were secure in their control and domination, viewing their slaves as tools to affect their own social status, not human beings with any form of agency. But when they could no longer control the black egalitarian ideals after emancipation, white turfmen in the north and south united to force the black turfmen out of the visible roles at the track.

The New Orleans social and political struggles from the 1860s through the 1910s concerning the track were, in many respects, a metaphorical horse race. Like the “forgotten alternatives” described by C. Vann Woodward, the competing visions of the world of the turf were all in the running by the turn of the twentieth century. And just like a horse race, it was pace that would prove vital in determining a victor. Tom Ainslie’s *Guide to Thoroughbred Racing* asserts that “longer races are won or lost in the first three-quarters. This remains true whether the ultimate winner be a front-runner which leads all the way, or a stretch-runner which steams out of the pack to win in the last jump. The pace analyst looks for the horse able to set or overcome the fastest probable early pace without tiring too badly in the homestretch.”²² As African-Americans, Old South elites, New South capitalists and industrialists, Louisiana politicians, Progressive reformers, and religious reformers galloped down the race track of the

²¹ Mooney, 15.

²² Tom Ainslie, *Ainslie’s Complete Guide to Thoroughbred Racing* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), 245.

second half of the nineteenth century, the race remained wide open as they wound down the backstretch. Some of the horses began to lose steam as they rounded the last turn. When the horses representing the hopes and aspirations of all these competing factions regarding thoroughbred racing came down the homestretch of the late 1890s and 1900s, victory would only be achieved by the one best able to muster its energy for a final burst of speed.

**CHAPTER ONE:
RACE FOR GLORY:
THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN ROLE IN THE WORLD OF THE TURF**

In April 1854 at the Metairie Course in New Orleans, Abe Hawkins, a slave belonging to Duncan Kenner, saddled up on Lecomte, preparing to face off against Lexington, a fine thoroughbred horse out of Kentucky. In a rematch of the prior week's Great Post Stakes, Abe, riding Lecomte, defeated Creole jockey Henry Meichon in a race that the *New Orleans Picayune* called "the greatest four mile race on record."¹ Fifty-four years later, jockey Jimmy Lee, after an incident in which several white jockeys conspired to box in his horse and prevent a fair chance for victory, sought out one of his competitors at the St. Charles Hotel in New Orleans and warned him that he "would stand for no nonsense."² Gossip had been circling the turf that "white riders had organized to draw the color line."³ The divergent experiences of these two Louisiana jockeys exemplify the changing status of African-American jockeys in the world of the turf.

The antebellum track, just like the plantation, was an arena that depended upon the labor of unfree black slaves and their success only served to maintain a system of strict racial hierarchy and subjugation. But the slaves' horsemanship allowed them a unique set of privileges and a degree of autonomy that they used to challenge, negotiate, and redefine their conceptions of liberty and freedom. After emancipation, these former enslaved jockeys used their renown to ride independently and earned much national fame and fortune. Their experiences on the track sustained their hopes for the equality latent in the Reconstruction amendments and the equitable respect due them for their talents. As C. Vann Woodward argued in *The Strange Career of Jim*

¹ "Great Four Mile Day: The Fastest Time on Record!" *Daily Picayune*, April 9, 1854.

² "Gossip of the Racetrack," *New York Sun*, May 23, 1908.

³ "Negro Jockeys Shut Out," *New York Times*, July 28, 1900.

Crow, this period was one of “forgotten alternatives” and the African-Americans of the turf fought to defend their dreams of emancipation in the face of determined white supremacy.⁴ But after the entrenchment of Jim Crow, white fears arose that the continued success of black jockeys would only inflame the passions of decidedly non-servile African-Americans across the nation. The jockeys’ egalitarian conduct did not conform to the image of black Americans that resonated with many white Americans in the Jim Crow era. Throughout the first decade of the twentieth century, black jockeys were forced off the track by a variety of methods, both within the structure of the sport and without. Believing that racial concord there would bring about disorder in society, white Americans created the societal threat of the black jockey and advocated repression to combat him. In doing so, they were able to nationally establish unity and order through the “time-honored device [of] exclusion” and control.⁵

The planter aristocracy of the Old South drew comparisons between their slaves and thoroughbred horses. John B. Irving, in his history of the South Carolina Jockey Club, argued that a well-trained thoroughbred was a symbol of obedience and a sign of the natural order.⁶ Other social critics noted this rhetoric too, like the Reverend Joseph Holt Ingraham who compared the slave market to horse trading in that slaves “are handed from one [master] to another with the passiveness of a purchased horse.”⁷ The relationship is made literal in Mortimer Thomson’s account of a slave auction in Savannah, Georgia, in March 1859. The slaves were brought to the race course in Savannah “and there quartered in the sheds erected for the

⁴ C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965).

⁵ Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 156.

⁶ John B. Irving, *The South Carolina Jockey Club* (Charleston, SC: Russell & Jones, 1857).

⁷ Joseph Holt Ingraham, *The South-West: By a Yankee* (New York, 1835), 194.

accommodation of the horses and carriages of gentlemen attending the races.”⁸ In both Ingraham’s and Thomson’s accounts, the slaves were inspected like horses with potential buyers “pulling their mouths open to see their teeth, pinching their limbs to find how muscular they were, walking them up and down to detect any signs of lameness.”⁹ John Gilmer Speed still used the language of submission in his 1905 history of *The Horse in America*, describing an unruly “bully” horse as one that “knows the touch of the master hand and stops his ‘monkey shines’ in very short order.”¹⁰ Even the African-American jockeys bought into the comparative rhetoric. Instead of identifying with the submissive relationship of horse to master, however, their close connection to the horses made them aware of the wild spirit and freedom that characterized the thoroughbred. The jockeys saw the horse trainers and grooms as servile, like a broken horse. The sense of freedom identified in the thoroughbred horse was something that the jockeys believed they could also locate within themselves.

The early slave jockeys of the American turf may have internalized some conception of freedom that came from riding the horse. But slaves served as more than just jockeys in their many roles on the track. First and foremost, they were the primary caretakers of the stables and horses. When William J. Minor published his instructions on how to train two year old horses, he wanted to pass on important knowledge to new horse owners and breeders. He included

⁸ Mortimer Thomson, *What Became of the Slaves on a Georgia Plantation?: Great Auction Sale of Slaves at Savannah, Georgia – March 2d & 3d, 1859*, (n.p. 1863), 6.

⁹ Thomson, 8.; Ingraham’s similar quote can be found in Ingraham, 195.

¹⁰ John Gilmer Speed, *The Horse in America: A Practical Treatise on the Various Types Common in the United States* (New York: McClure, Phillips & Company, 1905), 247.; The comparison is rather explicit here in the use of the word “monkey shines,” derived from the song “Jump Jim Crow” in Thomas D. Rice’s minstrel act of the 1830s. Speed also distinguishes the “bully horse” from the “crazy horse” and the “fool horse.” The latter two do not stop acting up for their owner and Speed describes them as such: “The crazy horse can be subdued by the Rarey or other similar method, but for the fool horse there is no hope. He learns nothing, remembers nothing – the glue factory for him is the only proper place.” Speed, 247.

extremely detailed descriptions on certain topics, such as what to feed horses, what exercise techniques are best, what modes of discipline can be used. But the information that was most likely to vary dependent on each horse, and thus could be most readily identified by someone who had an instinct and closeness with the horse, was left unsaid.¹¹ These silences were likely because of Minor's belief that good horse owners or breeders would have a knowledgeable slave working in their stables with the experience necessary to overcome those gaps. The owner need not worry about those trivialities and should focus on major duties instead.¹² The slaves who worked as grooms would be the ones taking care of these horses daily. They would start young, the boys being trained under experienced grooms who could teach them how to safely clean, feed, and nurture the half-ton animal.

Black slaves were also to be found as spectators at the race tracks. Irving described the South Carolina courses as having a "*Backgammon Board* appearance... [with] *black* and *white* groups, dotting the Course here and there."¹³ The presence of black slaves in the racing crowds enforced racial hierarchies and some earned the privilege of being able to attend the races during any recreational opportunity. This could be revoked at any point, however, especially in a cruel fashion. British traveler Isaac Weld noted in the Carolinas and Georgia that "it is no uncommon thing there, to see gangs of negroes staked at a horse race, and to see these unfortunate beings

¹¹ For examples, Minor would write about what to feed the horses, but not how often. He would mention good exercise techniques, but not how often to exercise the horse.

¹² William J. Minor, "Short Rules for Training Two Year Olds," Box 1, Folder 2, William J. Minor Papers, Mss. 859, 1854, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, LA (hereafter cited as Minor Papers).

¹³ Irving, 15.

bandied about from one set of drunken gamblers to another.”¹⁴ The slave attendees were constantly aware of their status at the race track, even while they were able to enjoy and bet on the races.

The most visible slave role on the track was that of jockey. If a groom were small enough, he might also double as a jockey. As three-year-old thoroughbreds in competitive races could generally only carry ninety pounds, which included the jockey, saddle, and other equipment, small boys or young men were preferred for the role. Skill was not all that important.¹⁵ The most important characteristic for a slave jockey was a trim figure. Even that could be overcome as *Porter's Spirit of the Times* recommended “burying [Negro jockeys] three times a week (four hours at a time) in stable manure, up to their chins,” for a steaming process that would stunt their growth and reduce their weight.¹⁶ Other than the elite turfmen who rode their own horses as an aristocratic symbol, jockeying was seen as “nigger work,” as noted by David Wiggins in his study of black athletes, arguing that it paradoxically “greatly enlarged the black jockey’s economic and social opportunities.”¹⁷ Not all Southern turfmen agreed with this sentiment, though, and Duncan Kenner was one of those who “gave nearly as much attention to the training of his young Negro riders as he did to his steeds.”¹⁸ But Kenner was an exception among his peers. Even as late as the 1890s, for the stable owner looking for a jockey among the

¹⁴ Isaac Weld, *Travels Through the States of North America and the Provinces of Upper and Lower Canada, During the Years 1795, 1796, and 1797*, 4th ed. (London: T. Gillet, 1807), 1:150.

¹⁵ Mooney, 40.

¹⁶ “To Correspondents,” *Porter's Spirit of the Times*, May 28, 1859, 200.

¹⁷ David K. Wiggins, *Glory Bound: Black Athletes in a White America* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 32.

¹⁸ Craig A. Bauer, *A Leader Among Peers: The Life and Times of Duncan Farrar Kenner* (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1993), 93.

“colored boys,” the *Thoroughbred Record* recommended just walking “through the streets of any Southern town where niggers are as plentiful as flies... and pick a likely boy off the street.”¹⁹

With little emphasis on skill on the early turf, the jockey was little more than a slim fellow who could direct a horse.

But for the white turfmen, racing was an institution that defined people and solidified hierarchy, both among themselves and over their black slaves. Despite the wealth of the white planters who funded and organized the races, their stables could not function without their dependence on the skill of black horsemen. The ideas of honor that united white turfmen, reinforced through victories at the track, would not exist without the black expertise in their stables. The slave owners did acknowledge this to some extent in that the slaves who took care of the horses were afforded a separate status and form of autonomous privilege denied other plantation slaves. This could be seen at Duncan F. Kenner’s Ashland plantation where slaves associated with Kenner’s racing stable, including Henry Hammond, were able to progress from stable hand to jockey to coachman.²⁰ With that privilege then came the great pressure not to upset the tensions inherent between their autonomy and slavery. On sugar planter William J. Minor’s plantation, he disciplined the slave horsemen who erred, starting with physical abuse, then sending them out to work as a field slave.²¹ Black horsemen balanced a unique set of

¹⁹ “Training Jockeys,” *The Thoroughbred Record* 44, no. 17. Lexington, KY, 24 October 1896, 201. ; The article continues on stating that you should “find out where his ‘mammy’ lives and secure her consent – the daddy doesn’t count in this instance – too many ‘no account niggahs’ down there – and the imp of darkness is yours.”

²⁰ Bauer, 65.

²¹ Charles L. Wingfield, “The Sugar Plantations of William J. Minor, 1830-1860” (master’s thesis, Louisiana State University, 1950), 74.

pressures than did other slaves on the plantation as can be seen through the lives of Abe Hawkins and Charles Stewart.

Few slave jockeys received national acclaim, but Duncan Kenner's slave, Abe Hawkins earned renown because of his skills in the Lexington-Lecomte rivalry. Listed among all the other slaves in Duncan Kenner's slave register, Abe was exceptional at his task – racing horses.²² The *Picayune* lamented that “everybody can't have Abe,” but Kenner was certainly grateful for his slave, as Abe's prestige carried himself and Kenner's stables to national prominence.²³ Abe surpassed other jockeys in print, often being the only one mentioned by name in news articles about races.²⁴ However, Abe's celebrity did not worry Southern white turfmen at all. Instead, his victories conferred prestige upon them and their horses, in addition to reasserting their view of racial harmony within hierarchy.

Charles Stewart served in the most important position on the antebellum turf, as a trainer. Even among knowledgeable horse owners, they still had a professional overseer to train the horses, often an experienced black slave. The life of a horseman necessitated mobility – something commonly lacking in any definition of slavery. The privileges afforded to black horsemen included general mobility to facilitate the movement of horses and the opportunity to earn a slight income with the success of the stable. The centrality of the trainer's role in managing the stables meant that the enslaved trainers, especially successful ones, were able to earn some fame, privilege, and fortune. Irving's history of South Carolina mentions Colonel

²² Slave lists, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 3, Duncan Kenner Papers, Mss. 198, 1402, 1477, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, LA (hereafter cited as Kenner Papers).

²³ “Metairie Jockey Club Races,” *Daily Picayune*, April 3, 1861.

²⁴ Examples can be found in “Matairie [sic] Course – Third Day,” (New Orleans) *Daily Delta*, April 3, 1860.; “Metairie Jockey Club Races,” *Daily Picayune*, April 2, 1861.

Richard Singleton's slave trainer, Cornelius, known for "his attachment to his master, and devotedness to his true interests," famous at the Charleston race course and remembered fondly as "a feature in the crowd upon the race field."²⁵ The most notable antebellum trainer however was Charles Stewart, a slave trainer whose story was transcribed by Annie Porter, niece of the Louisiana sugar planter, Alexander Porter.²⁶

Charles Stewart learned the skills of the turf as a slave boy in the Virginia stables of William Ransom Johnson, a prominent politician and horseman. He so distinguished himself that he soon was traveling long distances solo between Johnson's stables in Virginia and Kentucky to deliver horses and supervise operations. When he desired to marry, looking for "a good nigger to cook and wash for [him]," he found his ideal wife in Betsey Dandridge. She had just been sold to another owner, but Stewart located him at the Richmond courthouse, where he was talking with a few other white men. Walking up and introducing himself as "Colonel Johnson's Charles," Stewart recalled with delight how he "saw two or three gentlemen [he] knew well standing by, but [he] didn't ask anybody to speak for [him]; [he] spoke for [himself]."²⁷ Being told that her price was \$350, Stewart went around to the office of Johnson's agent, who also served as his agent, and withdrew the money to purchase Betsey Dandridge. After four years of unhappily wedded life in which Stewart claimed that no form of physical abuse or discipline could convince her to tell the truth, he sold his wife back to her former owner for the same price. He also included their children in the deal to make up for the "the wear and tear" on his wife,

²⁵ Irving, 188.

²⁶ I have taken the liberty of "translating" the story from the printed dialect of the article.

²⁷ Annie Porter, "My Life as a Slave," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 69, no. 413 (October 1884): 735.

relating it to horse-breeding and the belief that in a bad breed, “a colt is most apt to take after the dam, anyhow.”²⁸ Preferring the subservience of animals, Stewart used the money from selling his family to purchase a horse named Brown Jim, who “was worth the money.”²⁹

Alexander Porter purchased Stewart in 1841 and immediately put him in charge of “a racing establishment where there were never less than twelve horses in training, and which kept forty or forty-five men and boys constantly employed.”³⁰ Stewart’s sale was a matter of pride for him, as his service to Johnson allowed him to request his own sale. After the death of Stewart’s second wife, he met Judge Porter who was traveling through Kentucky in search of a new head trainer. Stewart negotiated with Porter himself before agreeing on a price of \$3,500 to go to Johnson. After finalizing his own sale, he went to his second wife’s owner and purchased his own son for \$150, but then left him with his sister-in-law upon realizing that he “wasn’t sure they would let a free nigger, or rather a nigger that belonged to his own daddy, stay on the place.”³¹ As with his own purchase and sale of his first wife, Stewart worked within the slave system and white values system, demonstrating the importance of *ownership* to him, not freedom. He was not going to undermine his own privileged existence by threatening to bestow it on his family.

Free black men, like William Johnson of Natchez, were also fond of the races. Edwin Davis and William Hogan noted in *The Barber of Natchez* that “William Johnson’s avid and sustained interest in horse racing was partially an outgrowth of life-long homage rendered to the

²⁸ Ibid., 735.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 731.

³¹ Ibid., 737.

way of life practiced by the rich planters of the Natchez area.”³² Arna Bontemps and other African-American writers of the twentieth century would see this adoption of white values as a misstep for a free black man, but William Johnson viewed the track as his method of advancement in society. Colonel Adam L. Bingaman, the “Napoleon of the Southern Turf” and a great Natchez planter, even allowed Johnson to breed his horses with Bingaman’s prized bloodhorses, a measure of gratitude for a man who had earned some level of respect as one of the elite free black men in Natchez.³³ Favors like these, no matter how genuine, served to further divide free black men from slaves. Even when “the white citizens of Natchez recognized that [Johnson] was at the top of the free Negro ladder... there was a demarcation line that he could not cross in relations with them,” and Johnson knew that to sustain his place in society meant falling in line with white standards of order.³⁴

The defining characteristic of the black horseman on the antebellum turf can be described as privilege. Instead of denying the abilities of black horsemen, the white Southern turfmen allowed them to thrive. This not only brought great reward to the turfmen at the expense of black labor, but also demonstrated the turfmen’s assurance that the structure of slavery would constrain the horsemen from capitalizing on their privileges to oppose the system. The close relationship that linked black horsemen and white turfmen convinced the white men that racial harmony was possible, provided that it upheld racial hierarchies. As with William Johnson in the free black community, the black slave horsemen had to conform to the desires and values of white turfmen in order to maintain their privileges.

³² Edwin Adams Davis and William Ransom Hogan, *The Barber of Natchez* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), 202.

³³ *Ibid.*, 236.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 92.

The confidence among white turfmen that black horsemen would not take advantage of their privileges was challenged in an incident when Thomas J. Wells believed that his horse Lecomte had been drugged when he lost one of his races against Lexington. He suspected Lecomte's jockey Abe had been the culprit, but also allowed that it may have been Lecomte's trainer, Hark.³⁵ The only evidence was anecdotal and conflicting as it implicated either Abe or Hark. The testimony of the slave Sam Page, one of Kenner's horsemen, suggested Hark. Page claimed to have seen Hark harboring runaway slaves for a fee before betraying them and pocketing the money, insinuating that a man who would sell out his own people in bondage could not be trusted.³⁶ Another source contradicted Page's testimony, implying that Page was also manipulating the turfmen by creating that story. This source claimed that Abe was seen with a \$100 bill and was very cautious with his suitcase, trusting only Sam Page to go near it.³⁷ Neither of the accused men ever admitted to drugging the horse, nor was there actually proof that the horse was drugged. Unable to determine any truth to the matter and because of the value of these black horsemen to their stables, Minor, Wells, and Kenner could not discipline the "prominent slave horsemen with anything but the subtlest pressures of privilege extended or withheld."³⁸ They simply pushed the issue aside and treated it as an exception to their idealized obedient slave narrative. They did not want to read too much into the different grudges and

³⁵ This is all assuming that Lecomte was actually drugged, which is unknown and unknowable. What is important is Wells' assertion that Lecomte was drugged and how Kenner and Minor discussed it, allowing the possibility that they might not be so secure with the black horsemen who they trusted implicitly.

³⁶ W.J. Minor to T.J. Wells, May 12, 1855, Box 1, Folder 4, Minor Papers.

³⁷ W.J. Minor to T.J. Wells, Sept 12, 1855, Box 1, Folder 4, Minor Papers.

³⁸ Mooney, 100.

games acted out among their slaves, afraid it would upset the comfort afforded by their belief in the complacent slave.

The outbreak of the Civil War in April 1861 did not just upset their belief system, but also decimated the Southern turf entirely. Black slaves capitalized on the disorder brought about by the war. Fears of a Natchez slave conspiracy in September 1861 led the planters to arrest many slaves, including several horsemen and carriage drivers, and imprison them at the race track in town where Adam Bingaman and William Minor once competed. Like the slave trainers, the carriage drivers in Natchez also had the privilege of mobility. They were able to attend horse races and “travel without a ‘pass,’ free of that document’s humiliating stamp of dependence,” as they traversed and conversed with the inhabitants of Natchez, free and slave.³⁹ Minor himself was present at the Examination Committee inquiry where, by September 25, 1861, he thought it was “clearly proved that there was a plot between a number of negroes on several plantations in the neighborhood of ‘Second Creek’ and Negroes in Natchez... to rise to murder their master... and then to take possession of their mistresses and all property.”⁴⁰ While Minor left no record on the number of men killed by the committee, another attendee, Benjamin Wailes recorded in his diary on October 23, 1861, that several of the condemned slaves “were taken out to the Race track and eight of them hung.”⁴¹ By using the race track as the setting for the torture, questioning, and executions, the Southern planter aristocracy and turfmen of Natchez were reasserting their authority in that place where they had established racial hierarchies and

³⁹ Winthrop Jordan, *Tumult and Silence at Second Creek: An Inquiry into a Civil War Slave Conspiracy*, Rev. ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 209.

⁴⁰ William J. Minor Plantation Diary, Sept 25, 1861, in William J. Minor and Family Papers, Mss. 519 and 594, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, LA (hereafter cited as Minor Family Papers).

⁴¹ Benjamin Leonard Covington Wailes Diary, October 23, 1861. Quoted in Jordan, 314.

subordination. The assertion of the slaves' privileges now led to brutal repression instead of the ambivalence from Kenner, Minor, and Wells previously.

The war deprived Duncan Kenner and William Minor of their plantation and racing assets. In August 1862, Union troops landed at Kenner's plantation, Ashland, confiscating as much property as they could, notably the horses and the riders.⁴² Kenner had been prepared for a Federal raid, mounting his prize-winning thoroughbred Sid Story and high-tailing it away from the incoming soldiers, quickly outpacing the Union cavalry.⁴³ Kenner's wife and children were left on their own. With few people to trust, they turned to one of Kenner's former jockeys, Henry Hammond, "a very light mulatto" who "was connected with the racing stable, but growing too heavy for a jockey, he became a coachman."⁴⁴ Kenner's wife gave a pistol to Hammond to help guard the family overnight until they could travel, trusting the horseman over the other slaves. The Union troops continued onward to Minor's plantation, Waterloo, where they seized his livestock, nine race horses, and five stable boys. Protesting the unjust seizure of property, Minor eventually regained most of his property, with the exception of his horses, already on their way

⁴² The one horse that remained was the stubborn Thoroughbred, Whale. As Rosella Kenner Brent recalled, the only one who could ever calm down Whale was Abe, but he was nowhere to be found during the Union raid. Since the other grooms refused to assist, the Union troops just gave up and continued onward without Whale. Annie Johnson, "A Legacy of Triumph: More Stories of Duncan F. Kenner and Abe Hawkins at Ashland Plantation," *Antebellum Turf Times*, March 3, 2014. <http://www.antebellumturfimes.com/2014/03/a-legacy-of-triumph-more-stories-of-duncan-f-kenner-and-abe-hawkins-at-ashland-plantation/>.

⁴³ "Recollections," Rosella Kenner Brent Papers, Mss. 1167, 1822, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, LA (hereafter cited as Brent Papers).

⁴⁴ "Henry Hammond," Brent Papers.

to the auction block.⁴⁵ Abe took advantage of the confusion provided by the raids to disappear, making his way to St. Louis to take advantage of his privileges, this time, as a free man.

Black horsemen, like Abe, believed that their skills and privileges learned on the Southern turf would bring them respect and opportunity. The track was still a place run on black labor and expertise; now with the coming of emancipation, the horsemen dreamed that their contributions would be acknowledged and valued. Abe began racing again in St. Louis in 1864, receiving mounts from multiple stables. One onlooker was amazed at Abe's performance, saying "I have seen all the best jockeys of Europe; not one of them is nearly the equal of that old darkey."⁴⁶ Making his way around the Northern tracks, he earned a small fortune and sparked the interest of the sporting news in the latent talents of black jockeys, now riding as free men, though many were still riding for their former masters. Abe's accomplishments confirmed Charles Dickens' observation that even with such examples of black success, "and others yet more striking of emancipated negroes amassing large fortunes and obtaining high social positions – the partisans of slavery [dared] persist in declaring that a negro left to himself, would starve for very laziness."⁴⁷ Abe belied that notion of black laziness and proved that "the stimulus of partial freedom" which was awarded to slave jockeys, was "sufficient to awaken energies and ambition which slavery crushes to the dust."⁴⁸

⁴⁵ J. Carlyle Sitterson, "The Transition from Slave to Free Economy on the William J. Minor Plantations," *Agricultural History* 17, no. 4 (October 1943): 217.

⁴⁶ "Some Old Time Racing," *Thoroughbred Record*, August 17, 1901, 79.

⁴⁷ Charles Dickens, "Slaves and Their Masters," *Household Words - A Weekly Journal Conducted by Charles Dickens* 14, no. 335 (August 23, 1856): 136.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Abe could have been a strong symbol for African-American rights and a threat to racial hierarchies. Instead, his legacy was one that sustained the white turfmen's belief in submissive black horsemen. In a favorite story they told, Abe recognized a friend of Duncan Kenner's at the Saratoga track. Knowing about Kenner's losses in the war, Abe sent a message to his former master to tell him that "I have ridden a great many races here in the North and have made right smart of money. It is all in the bank and it is his if he wants it, because I am just as much his servant as I ever was."⁴⁹ Kenner responded that Abe was welcome back whenever he wanted. After falling ill shortly thereafter, Abe took Kenner's offer and returned to Ashland, where Kenner "attended with paternal care to the wants of the supposed dying freeman, and saved him from the eager clutches of unwelcome death."⁵⁰ Abe finally died in June 1867 of consumption; Kenner did not bury him with the other slaves in the plantation cemetery, but instead in a small grave under a live oak tree overlooking the one-mile training track, the place where Abe had spent so much of his successful career. In such stories told by Southern turfmen, the freed horsemen were still subordinate to their former masters, but now it was of their own volition.

It was in this atmosphere of freedom that horse racing rose to preeminence in the United States, with many states establishing derbies to showcase the top talent. The Kentucky Derby began as a modest affair relative to today's race, but there was a confidence among the promoters that it would rise in prominence. The first Derby ran on May 17, 1875, and featured a

⁴⁹ Harry Worcester Smith, "Sportsman's Bookshelf," *Thoroughbred Record*, August 8, 1925, 67.

⁵⁰ *St. Louis Republican* article, May 1867. Quoted in Johnson, "Legacy."

race card with almost all of the horses carrying African-American jockeys.⁵¹ One of those jockeys, Oliver Lewis, and black trainer Ansel Williamson, won with Aristides. During the 1870s and 1880s, black and white horsemen shared the track in racial harmony, as the New Orleans *Times* noted in December 1873: “the darkies and whites mingle fraternally together, charmed into mutual happy sympathies by the inspiring influence of horse talk.”⁵² The greatest jockey to come out of the Derby though was Isaac Murphy, a man whose charismatic influence would fracture this harmonic existence and shake the foundations of American track society.

Isaac Murphy, one of the greatest African-American jockeys and a symbol of African-Americans’ aspirations of dignity and respect, stood in direct opposition to the ideal jockey model that Southern turfmen saw in Abe. Born in 1861 as the son of a Union Army veteran, Murphy was apprenticed in the Lexington, Kentucky, stables of his mother’s employer. He earned his first major victory in 1875 and finished second in the Kentucky Derby in 1879. By 1882, he was earning \$10,000 per year with a bonus of \$25 for every winning mount and still making \$15 for each loss. Though Murphy was too young to have distinct memories of slavery, he spent his life on the turf surrounded by black men who imparted their wisdom and experiences to him. One of those men was the trainer Edward Brown, who earned in his lifetime “\$100,000 in cash, a stunning fortune for a man who had been sold on the auction block in Lexington as a youth.”⁵³ After emancipation, Brown asserted his independence as a trainer, with

⁵¹ Ed Hotaling, *The Great Black Jockeys: The Lives and Times of the Men Who Dominated America’s First National Sport* (Rocklin, CA: Forum, 1999), 230. Hotaling complicates the common “fact” that “fourteen of the fifteen jockeys in the first Kentucky Derby were black,” which continues to be conveyed despite the incompleteness of the records.

⁵² New Orleans *Times*, December 14, 1873. Quoted in Dale Somers, *The Rise of Sports in New Orleans, 1850-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972), 97.

⁵³ Mooney, 184.

his horses producing much success on the Kentucky tracks. Brown demonstrated for Murphy the possibilities that came from freedom, possibilities that Murphy was determined to capture himself.

Murphy's success, winning three Kentucky Derbies – 1884, 1890, and 1891 – among many other stakes races, elevated him to a category of jockey that few others would ever reach. His fortune of \$125,000, as reported in 1887, was also unprecedented for both a black man and a jockey.⁵⁴ He led the way for a new professional class of black horsemen who took over the tracks in the 1870s and 1880s. As the *Spirit of the Times* reported in 1887, Murphy, Lewis, and other African-American jockeys “have almost monopolized the best mounts, and have been singularly successful.”⁵⁵ The *New York Herald*, in a fascination with the racial characteristics of these men, wrote that “if a composite photograph had been made of the jockeys who rode the six winners,” after the African-American jockeys swept the card at Gravesend, “it would have been as black as Erebus. There wouldn't have been a single light line in it, unless the camera happened to catch [Anthony] Hamilton with his mouth wide open displaying the pearly white teeth which form the only relieving feature of his coal black face.”⁵⁶ Murphy was the turf's embodiment of what would later be described as “black cool,” as practiced by Jack Johnson, Willie Mays, and countless other black athletes. “Defiance was the essence of Black cool,” artist Hank Willis Thomas argues. “It was one way for poor youth to defy the weight and gravity of their social

⁵⁴ “Personal Mention,” (New Orleans) *Weekly Pelican*, March 19, 1887.

⁵⁵ “St. Louis,” *Spirit of the Times*, June 25, 1887, 729.

⁵⁶ “Colored Jockeys Show the Way,” *New York Herald*, September 20, 1889.

class.”⁵⁷ Thomas continues that “it didn’t matter if he had the most material value, because he had an inner confidence that no one could knock down.”⁵⁸ Murphy’s reputation and defiance in the face of white prejudice made him a symbol not just for black turfmen, but black men across the nation. Heavyweight boxer Jack Johnson grew up in Galveston, Texas, dreaming of emulating his hero, Isaac Murphy. Johnson, before he grew too big to become a jockey, lost a job at “a Galveston livery stable when he exhausted one of the horses in his charge, racing with his friends in unauthorized imitation of his idol.”⁵⁹ The success of Murphy and other black horsemen in the 1880s energized black Americans who hoped that they would usher in an era of equality afforded them through their accomplishments and celebrity.

Part of Murphy’s success came from advancements in the field of jockeyship as it professionalized. There were two main styles in riding: the traditional English style and the

⁵⁷ Hank Willis Thomas, “Soul,” in *Black Cool: One Thousand Streams of Blackness*, ed. Rebecca Walker (Berkeley, CA: Soft Skull Press, 2012), 101.

⁵⁸ Thomas, 107.

⁵⁹ Geoffrey C. Ward, *Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 13.

newer American, or monkey-seat, style.⁶⁰ The evolution of jockeyship in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century brought attention to these changes, bringing victory to the practitioners of the new style. The older English style has a seat set further back on the horse and longer stirrups for greater control of horse movement, as is necessary in dressage. The American rider moved the seat further up on the horse, shifting both weight and control. This style also used shorter stirrups, allowing for maximum speed from the horse.⁶¹ This hunched-up crouch while sitting on the horse's shoulders allowed the horse to further extend its stride compared to the older style. The American riding style benefitted the changing nature of the American thoroughbred race with a focus on speed. Instead of saving energy at the beginning of the race and sprinting for the last half-mile, the jockeys would often run the race from start to finish, hoping to get a strong lead and carry it to the finish line. A horse that was ahead of the pack could not be interfered

⁶⁰ Tom Ainslie's *Complete Guide to Thoroughbred Racing* defines the "monkey crouch" as a "riding style popularized by Tod Sloan in which jockey bends forward over horse's withers; 'monkey-on-a-stick.'" Tom Ainslie, *Ainslie's Complete Guide to Thoroughbred Racing* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), 471. Sloan had a successful career in America since 1886, but began racing on the British turf in 1897. Sloan was not the first to race in that manner, as he was preceded on the British turf by African-American jockey Willie Simms in 1895. Racing historian Ed Hotaling argues that the monkey style originated much earlier in American history, citing the quarter horse races of the colonial period, like one in which later-Virginia Congressman John Randolph was compared to a monkey on a horse. That argument however, completely ignores the context of the style, a style in which "it is not inconceivable that some crouching was done by these taller, bigger men who often had to keep their heads lowered just to avoid tree branches along the racing path." James Robert Saunders and Monica Renae Saunders, *Black Winning Jockeys in the Kentucky Derby* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2003), 81. By linking Congressman Randolph's racing style to Simms's style and the equating the comparisons of both to monkeys, Hotaling removes the racial implications of the term that was applied to Willie Simms by the British turf press before Tod Sloan ever reached the English shores. Even as further research finds earlier evidence for the origins of the crouch style, in thoroughbred racing, the earliest evidence for the use of the term monkey to describe it is still press response to African-American jockey Simms. Edward A. Wasserman and Mark S. Blumberg, "Evolution of the Monkey Crouch," letter to the editor, *Science* 325 (August 14, 2009): 812. <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/325/5942/812.1>.

⁶¹ For sake of comparison, imagine running with a child holding onto your back with its legs wrapped around one's waist (English style) vs. a child sitting on one's shoulders (American style). The child has much more control of speed and direction when they are around the waist, but more speed can be delivered by the adult when the child is on one's shoulders.

with by the other riders or pocketed.⁶² Isaac Murphy was known for his use of the “monkey seat” which became the typical American jockey style by the turn of the twentieth century.⁶³

Isaac Murphy and other black horsemen established patronage and professional networks to advance economic and social mobility among African-Americans. Edward Brown negotiated a \$1,000 contract with Isaac Murphy to ride his horses, the largest amount known at that time to be paid from an African-American owner to an African-American jockey.⁶⁴ Black horsemen with insider information on horse and track conditions passed it along to their friends, who were then able to win big with the gamblers. White turfmen grew concerned at the increasing self-reliance of the black horsemen. The *New York Sportsman* reported on the grievances aired by the bookmakers at the Belmont Stakes in 1875, that because “Old Ansel [Williamson], [Oliver] Lewis, and the western ‘colored capitalists’ in general came down, like the wolf on the fold, with heavy investments,” they operated at a major loss.⁶⁵ The jockey William Walker, despite winning the 1877 Kentucky Derby, was threatened by the Louisville Jockey Club president M. Lewis Clark, who suspected that Walker was going to throw the race. “You will be watched the whole way,” warned Clark, “and if you do not ride to win, a rope will be put about your neck, and you will be hung to that tree yonder,”— accentuating the threat by gesturing at a tree near

⁶² Ainslie defines “interference” as “to impede another horse in the race.” He defines a “pocket” as a “racing predicament in which horse is surrounded by others and unable to increase speed until opening occurs.” Ainslie, 469-472.

⁶³ George Odom, “Why the American Seat is the Best for Jockeys,” *The Illustrated Sporting News* I, no. 16. New York, August 29, 1903.

⁶⁴ Mooney, 196.

⁶⁵ “Stables at Jerome Park,” *New York Sportsman*, May 29, 1875.

the judges' stand – “and I will help to do it.”⁶⁶ Even when suspicions of cheating were unfounded, the threat of lynching was invoked as a way to control the “excesses of freedom” that white turfmen identified in the black horsemen.⁶⁷

In response to the challenge afforded by Isaac Murphy, white turfmen utilized different rhetorical strategies to restrain Murphy's influence. Some turfmen completely denied the abilities of black men, dismissing Murphy and other horsemen as rare examples of their race, who might be a model for “many Afro-Charlestonians... who are now loafing around picking up a living by pilfering and raiding hen roosts.”⁶⁸ But those turfmen were only a small, but growing number, as the majority reasserted the beliefs of Duncan Kenner, William Minor, and other antebellum horsemen that while black horsemen were special, they would work within the white system of racial hierarchy and not upset the existing order. Contemporary turf historian John H. Davis was one of the men who still subscribed to the antebellum belief in admiring black horsemanship but as a means to enforce racial hierarchy. Davis acknowledged Murphy's celebrity but qualified it: “He was black of skin, but his heart was white as snow.”⁶⁹ Despite Murphy's charisma in black society, he still exhibited some “safe” ideas regarding employment demonstrated by his loyalty to one farm, refusing lucrative contracts elsewhere. A contributor to the *Spirit of the Times* described Murphy's loyalty as such: “When a nigger's bad, he's d—d bad; no doubt about it. But sir, when a nigger is attached to you and yours, all the money in New York couldn't make him

⁶⁶ Lynn S. Renau, *Racing Around Kentucky* (Louisville: Lynn S. Renau Antiques Consultant, 1995). Quoted in Hotaling, *Black Jockeys*, 236.

⁶⁷ Clark's suggestion that Walker planned to throw the race was questioned by numerous attendees, with the strongest evidence in the large bet that Walker had placed on his own horse.

⁶⁸ “Echoes of the Day,” *New York Sportsman*, February 5, 1887.

⁶⁹ John H. Davis, *The American Turf* (New York: John Polhemus, 1907), 103.

sell you out.”⁷⁰ Murphy, at least, conformed to white Southern turfmen’s worldview on loyalty, even as he continued to flout obedience.

The fears of white society continued to be provoked by black demands for equality. These fears that once manifested themselves quietly in some areas of horse racing now came to the forefront. Isaac Murphy began to recognize his market value and cast off his loyalty in favor of selectively negotiating employment, using legal force and negotiating contracts to protect his interests.⁷¹ The idea of a successful black professional who understood his market potential, who exercised his legal rights, and who wielded influence over a sizable portion of the American populace was a very real fear for white Southerners and turfmen. As historian Edward Ayers summarized the white fears, “black claims to respect... exceeded their bounds.”⁷² The continued identification of African-Americans with Murphy also bred concern, especially as seen in a common incident when after Murphy received a minor disciplinary infraction, “every negro on the track from the smallest pickaninny to the trainers espoused Murphy’s cause as if it were their own.”⁷³ White turfmen had to find a suitable answer for Isaac Murphy and they finally located one in a highly-publicized matchup against leading jockey Edward “Snapper” Garrison.

In a prelude to the later “Great White Hope” matches of the boxing world, Murphy, riding Salvator, faced Garrison, aboard Tenny, at the Coney Island Race Course on June 26, 1890. If Garrison won, it would be considered as a victory for white supremacy. In front of a

⁷⁰ “Post and Paddock,” *Spirit of the Times*, December 15, 1883, 592.

⁷¹ Wiggins, 21-33.

⁷² Edward Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th-Century American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 239.

⁷³ “Echoes of the Day,” *New York Sportsman*, January 7, 1888.

crowd of 25,000 people, Murphy took a thundering lead, setting records for the first mile and next eighth, while distancing himself from Garrison and Tenny. Garrison pulled out his whip and as they came around the far turn into the homestretch, Tenny exhibited a burst of speed that closed the gap with Salvator, putting them neck and neck down to the wire. Garrison was known for his thrilling “Garrison finish,” a whip-driven, come-from-behind victory by the narrowest of margins. In this race however, a photo-finish revealed that not only did Murphy win, but he appeared to take his victory in stride.⁷⁴ The photo showed that Murphy looked the part of grace in contrast to the frenetic energy that overtook Garrison. Murphy’s victory and his prolonged celebration was a trigger for corrective action; it was his Icarus moment, as he had transcended the unspoken limitations on success for black men and was about to come crashing back to meet the reality of the New South.

These correctives were applied to Murphy throughout the following months and continued to follow him for the rest of his career. After falling out of the saddle following an inexplicable last-place finish, reports proliferated that the renowned jockey was drunk, and he was suspended from racing for a time. As historian Ted Ownby notes in his study of Southern recreation culture, “one of the many hostile and suspicious beliefs of Southern whites linked the freedmen with wanton alcoholism.”⁷⁵ Murphy maintained that he had been sober for the race, and that his failure was the result of illness rather than drunkenness. In retrospect, his dizzy spell might have been the result of “flipping” – massive weight fluctuations between racing seasons and the struggle to keep under a riding weight. The “Rules of Racing” for the Jockey Club in

⁷⁴ William C. Rhoden, *Forty Million Dollar Slaves: The Rise, Fall, and Redemption of the Black Athlete* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006), 63-66.

⁷⁵ Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 172.

1908, in a rule that has been enforced throughout most eras of American thoroughbred racing, stated “a horse shall not be qualified to run in a race with more than 5 lbs. overweight.”⁷⁶

Maintaining a racing weight was a struggle shared by all jockeys. Black jockey Wallace Hicks, after losing his contract for failure to remain under 110 pounds, simply remarked “well, every man has his weakness. With some it’s whiskey and women - with me, it’s gumbo and chicken.”⁷⁷

Murphy’s main strategy to make weight was to starve himself and take long walks in the days before a race, undermining his health and eventually leading to the pneumonia that would kill him.⁷⁸ Champagne was one method of combating the effects of flipping, and it is possible that Murphy had been drinking champagne as a stimulant, as many other jockeys did in a quasi-medicinal manner.⁷⁹

Though he won the Kentucky Derby in 1891, it was merely the coda to an illustrious career, tainted by scandal. Murphy, in a display of frustration, told a reporter for the *Spirit of the Times* that he hoped he could repair his reputation down in New Orleans since, “I am disgusted with the way they treated me in the East during the summer. When I won it was all right, but when I lost, and when not on the best horse, they would say, ‘There, that nigger is drunk again.’ I

⁷⁶ Jockey Club, *Horses in Training – 1908: Embracing All Horses Engaged in Stakes on American Courses, Including All Two-Year-Olds Registered with the Jockey Club* (New York: H.A. Buck, 1908), 203. As noted earlier in the chapter, the allotted weight for the horse includes jockey, saddle, and equipment. If the assigned jockey puts the horse over that five pound threshold, then the horse will be scratched.

⁷⁷ Louis J. Hennessey, *Diamond Jubilee: The Fair Grounds, New Orleans, Season 1947-1948* (New Orleans: New Orleans Fair Grounds Corporation, 1948), 33.

⁷⁸ Wiggins, 27.

⁷⁹ Mooney, 209.

tell you, I am disgusted and soured on the whole business.”⁸⁰ To the delight of white Southern turfmen, Murphy was never able to regain his former glory, dying at age thirty-five on February 12, 1896 – the same year as *Plessy v. Ferguson*. But the \$30,000 he bequeathed to his wife and the contracts that he earned proved that jockeyship was more than just “nigger work.” Murphy marked the beginning of the end, the apogee of opportunity for black post-bellum horsemen. As the color line shifted throughout the 1890s and 1900s, white turfmen thought it less proper for black men to make their living as jockeys.⁸¹

As Ray Stannard Baker observed in 1904, while Southerners speak of the “threat of Negro domination,” meaning black political power, “there exists a far more real and sinister form of Negro domination. For the Negro still dominates the *thought* of the South.”⁸² The rise and subsequent decline of black liberties after the Civil War were facilitated by the reconciliation of Northern and Southern turfmen as the “racing men of the 1870s created in miniature at the track the political and economic structures they favored, and they strengthened the bonds of camaraderie and common interest that could give their models formative power on a national scale.”⁸³ The rules that governed the American Jockey Club in New York prevented a jockey from switching between employers without the permission of his current manager, barring him from racing any horses if he left without consent. In a similar system of subordination to that established on Southern plantations where “planters seeking to hold on to the workers they

⁸⁰ “New Orleans,” *Spirit of the Times and Sportsman*, February 22, 1896, 156. Quoted in Mooney, *Race Horse Men*, 211.

⁸¹ Arthur R. Ashe, Jr., *A Hard Road to Glory: A History of the African-American Athlete 1619-1918* (New York: Warner Books, 1988), 47-48.

⁸² Ray Stannard Baker, *Following the Color Line: American Negro Citizenship in the Progressive Era* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964 [1908]), 253.

⁸³ Mooney, 159.

already had might favor draconian measures to keep blacks from leaving,” the American Jockey Club restricted black mobility, and hence, freedom, by taking away a jockey’s ability to amend his employment obligations through the removal of his labor.⁸⁴ August Belmont – financier, Jockey Club leader, Democratic National Committee chairman, and head of the emergent post-bellum elite – sought to create a new Democratic union, uniting Northern industrialists, white Southerners, and city political machines. His political and economic efforts championed the reunion of Northern and Southern turfmen, now united in their desire to enforce order and strict racial hierarchy at the track.

Beyond the strict control of labor by the Jockey Clubs, racial hierarchies were often reinforced through segregation. This method was present, but not entirely effective in New Orleans. Before 1871, most Louisiana tracks had policies like that of the Metairie Jockey Club, allowing black spectators to any part of the grandstand with general admission tickets – barring, of course, the section for club members, and the section for ladies, thereby, both reinforcing class standing and protecting the virtues of southern white womanhood. The Metairie Jockey Club revised this policy in 1871, instituting a separate grandstand for black attendees. Historian Dale Somers argues that this was likely the club’s manner of “[demonstrating] opposition to Radical

⁸⁴ William Cohen, *At Freedom’s Edge: Black Mobility and the Southern White Quest for Racial Control, 1861-1915* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), xv.; This is also very similar to the reserve clause set up in other sports leagues, most notably challenged by African-American baseball player Curt Flood in the landmark Supreme Court case *Flood v. Kuhn* (1972). Flood explained his rationale for the lawsuit on ABC’s *Wide World of Sports*, saying, “I don’t think there is anything more damaging to a person’s ego as a human being than to be traded or bought and sold like a piece of property.” When Howard Cosell followed up that Flood’s \$90,000 annual salary was not slave wages, Flood cut straight to the heart of the matter, arguing that “a well-paid slave is nonetheless a slave.” Brad Snyder, *A Well-Paid Slave: Curt Flood’s Fight for Free Agency in Professional Sports* (New York: Viking, 2006), 103-104.

civil rights policies.”⁸⁵ The African-American newspaper, the *Louisianian*, reported on the return of the “demonic spirit of caste... for the first time, there has been erected a separate stand on the ground, to prevent the mingling of whey faces, and *sang meles*.... The managers of the course have pandered to the ignoble passions and prejudices of those who possess no other claim to superiority, than the external shading of a skin.”⁸⁶ The editor then exhorted African-American men not to idly accept “this deliberate insult to our manhood and our self-respect,” and rather than continuing to patronize the courses, to “withhold every cent of it,” and not “contribute your money to the support of institutions which take your money, and give the value of it to others.”⁸⁷ When the Louisiana Jockey Club gained control of the New Orleans turf later that year, it returned to the older policy, allowing blacks into the public grandstand, though, barring them from the quarter stretch near the finish line.⁸⁸ This newer policy of the Louisiana Jockey Club was itself contested, when two African-American racing enthusiasts sued the club in May 1874, arguing that by refusing to sell them admission to the quarter stretch, the club violated the law guaranteeing equal access to public accommodations. Even with support from the *Louisianian* and the black community, the lawsuit failed. Despite these small measures, segregation was generally not prevalent on the New Orleans tracks, and as historian Dale Somers observed “racial policies and attitudes in [New Orleans] remained far from rigid before the 1890s.”⁸⁹ Some measure of racial harmony did exist on the tracks.

⁸⁵ Dale Somers, “Black and White in New Orleans: A Study in Urban Race Relations, 1865-1900,” *Journal of Southern History* 40, no. 1 (February 1974): 26.

⁸⁶ “More Prejudice,” *The Louisianian*, April 9, 1871.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Somers, *Rise of Sports*, 97.

⁸⁹ Somers, “Black and White,” 22.

That racial harmony would be challenged by demographic changes within New Orleans. Historian Joy Jackson argues that the heightened racial tension grew out of an increase in the black population of the city, increasing over twenty percent in the decade from 1890 to 1900.⁹⁰ She believes that the “newcomers from the country were likely to get into trouble more easily [than urban-born blacks] and inspire resentment among the poor whites with whom they competed for jobs.”⁹¹ Donald DeVore provides deeper analysis of this time period, adding that the African-American migration occurred because “many of them knew from personal experience that a reign of terror exists in many parts of the state,” evidenced by the more than two-hundred and thirty-two African-Americans who were lynched in Louisiana between 1882 and 1903.⁹² The violence found its way into the city too; the 1900 Robert Charles riot in New Orleans left many dead or injured and convinced white New Orleans “that the maintenance of white supremacy demanded that additional Negroes suffer for [Charles’s] deeds.”⁹³ The deterioration of African American rights and opportunities was symbolized by a small legal challenge over an 1890 Louisiana law regarding segregated railroad accommodations that grew into the Supreme Court case, *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). Louisianan Edward D. White, a man “who helped redeem Louisiana from Republican rule during Reconstruction,” was one of the Associate Justices who signed on to the majority opinion that upheld state-sponsored racial

⁹⁰ Joy Jackson, *New Orleans in the Gilded Age: Politics and Urban Progress, 1880-1896* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), 21.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁹² Donald DeVore, *Defying Jim Crow: African American Community Development and the Struggle for Racial Equality in New Orleans, 1900-1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), 23-29.

⁹³ William Ivy Hair, *Carnival of Fury: Robert Charles and the New Orleans Race Riot of 1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), 188.

segregation so long as the separate institutions were equal.⁹⁴ The disfranchisement of African-Americans in the new Constitution of 1898 further reinforced the notion that the state would offer no voice to a group that constituted twenty-seven percent of the city of New Orleans.⁹⁵ This disfranchisement was part of the *search for order*, as elite white Louisianans applied it to stabilize and protect “traditional patterns of white political privilege” against “the actual exercise of the franchise by black citizens and the manipulation of the same by Bourbon oligarchs.”⁹⁶

The 1890s marked the beginning of the end for black horsemen, too, as Jim Crow solidified its hold on the South. “Jim Crow,” as historian Kevin Gaines defines it, was “the white South’s, and the nation’s, solution to the social advancement of a rising class of African Americans that threatened a polity founded on white supremacy.”⁹⁷ The threat of social advancement by African Americans to white turfmen became increasingly pronounced, as evidenced by Isaac Murphy’s appeal. Three major shifts in American society in the 1890s reduced the prominence of the black jockey. First, the entrenchment of Jim Crow laws throughout the South limited the opportunities available to African-Americans. Second, the earliest stages of the First Great Migration not only featured black movement from the South to the North, but also from the rural areas to urban ones. Trapped within the city confines, young black men were unlikely to have the same exposure to horses and the world of the turf that their

⁹⁴ Michael J. Klarman, *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights: The Supreme Court and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 16.

⁹⁵ *Abstract of the Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904), 104.

⁹⁶ Justin A. Nystrom, *New Orleans After the Civil War: Race, Politics, and a New Birth of Freedom* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 215.

⁹⁷ Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 30.

predecessors did.⁹⁸ Third, the attachment of large amounts of capital to the sport shut out the black horsemen. Some of them were able to negotiate the system and gain vast amounts of wealth, but many were unable to capitalize on their turf opportunities. The continued “incorporation of America” made it more difficult for the smaller stables of black horsemen to survive when they went up against racing conglomerates. Track official Joseph Murphy claimed that the black jockey disappeared because “when racing was in eclipse the great breeding farms of Kentucky where the Negro jockey was born and developed were broken up and the horses and employees scattered.”⁹⁹ These three factors created a lost generation of black horsemen. Beginning in the 1890s, the young men who would otherwise be trained to join the world of the turf, embarked on other opportunities once they were excluded from the track. The disappearance of the black jockey would only be realized twenty years later as the remaining black horse men grew too old and retired.

The rise and fall of Jimmy Lee, the most successful black jockey of this last generation, reveals the confluence of events that drove the black jockey off the track (see Figures 1 and 2). Born in Raceland, Louisiana, around 1890, Lee’s “fondness for the horse grew into a desire to become a jockey.”¹⁰⁰ With his adept ability to handle a thoroughbred, he soon attracted the attention of the horsemen at the New Orleans Fair Grounds and earned a few mounts at the course. Against other racers, his riding was good but unexceptional, winning only twelve percent

⁹⁸ Instead, their exposure to sports like baseball, basketball, and football greatly increased.

⁹⁹ Joseph A. Murphy, “What Happened to the Negro Jockey?” *The Horseman’s Journal*, November 1949.

¹⁰⁰ “Jockey J. Lee, the ‘Black Demon’ of the Turf,” *Louisville Courier-Journal*, June 6, 1907.

of his mounts in 1906.¹⁰¹ Renowned horseman J.B. “Rome” Respass of Covington, Kentucky saw a real knack for speed in the young boy however and signed him to a \$3,500 annual contract for first-call on his services, though Lee was still able to accept mounts as a free-lancer when Respass was not racing.¹⁰²



Figure 1: Jockey Jimmy Lee
Credit: Keeneland-Cook Collection, Keeneland Library

¹⁰¹ “Standing of the Jockeys in 1906,” *Daily Racing Form*, January 4, 1907.

¹⁰² “Notes of the Turf,” *Daily Racing Form*, April 18, 1907.



Figure 2: Jimmy Lee at the Coney Island Jockey Club in 1908
Credit: Keeneland-Hemment Collection, Keeneland Library

Lee's most famed race occurred on June 5, 1907, when he led six out of six horses on a six race card to victory at Churchill Downs.¹⁰³ The Louisville *Courier-Journal* led its story by

¹⁰³ This epic day of racing was also a great day for gamblers. If a gambler placed a one dollar bet on Lee's first mount, then placed the successive winnings on a bet on his next horse, this risky gambler could have netted \$15,000 after choosing all the winners. "What One Dollar Bet On Lee's Mounts Would Have Done," *Louisville Courier-Journal*, June 6, 1907. The bookmakers that day, as represented by Alphonso Fontelieu, had a terrible day. Fontelieu spent the day "taunting the bettors by defying them to bet on the black rider" after each of Lee's victorious mounts. "Black Star Shines," *Louisville Times*, June 6, 1907.; "Alphe" Fontelieu had a habit of laying bets against African-American jockeys, as he continued to do so even after his depressing showing with Lee on June 5, 1907. The Cincinnati papers reported that Fontelieu took a "great delight in laying against anything that jockey [Dale] Austin rides, and the consequence is a losing sheet whenever the colored boy lands a winner." "Notes of the Turf," *Daily Racing Form*, July 7, 1907. Whether this bookmaker from New Iberia, Louisiana, honestly believed that black jockeys could not win, or if he played up that belief to goad more bettors into placing their bets with him is unknowable.

stating that “when a mite of a negro boy, born and reared in the Southland, with all that this condition in life means, can hold spellbound thousands of people who are cultured and refined and educated, it stands to reason that this youngster of ebony hue has something which differs greatly from that which few human beings have.”¹⁰⁴ After Lee won the first five races of the day, the crowd was agog at this young jockey, but the most remarkable race was the final one. The turf men believed that “Jockey Lee was a great rider in short-distanced events, but that he had poor judgment when it came to riding races of a mile or more.” The final race of the day was at a distance of a mile and three-eighths.¹⁰⁵ Within the first quarter of a mile, Lee was able to pilot the horse, Foreigner, to a lead of more than a dozen lengths and won while “Foreigner at the finish was staggering like an inebriate.”¹⁰⁶ It was his lead that allowed Lee to hold on just long enough to snatch victory from the competition as his black and orange dotted suit and white cap crossed the invisible wire. The final effort to bring Foreigner across the finish brought out the “generalship of this negro boy” as he began to ride with an effort “which people say is not human.”¹⁰⁷ It was this “barbaric” effort that merited Jimmy Lee the nickname of “The Black Demon.” The *Louisville Times* reported that, with the success, “the negroes think Jockey Lee is under a hoodoo spell” and it “looked as if someone dusted him yesterday with ‘foofoo

¹⁰⁴ “Wonderful Record Made by Jockey Lee,” *Louisville Courier-Journal*, June 6, 1907.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ “Black Star Shines,” *Louisville Times*, June 6, 1907.

¹⁰⁷ “Wonderful Record Made by Jockey Lee,” *Louisville Courier-Journal*, June 6, 1907.

powder.”¹⁰⁸ But Lee attributed his own success to his personal ambition “to be a greater jockey than was Isaac Murphy.”¹⁰⁹

That statement likely did not sit well with white Southern turfmen and jockeys. It was not long after his record-breaking day of racing at Churchill Downs that Lee saw the negative aspects of all the attention. While racing at Latonia, Lee won only one of two races that he should have won, as “he was shut off and impeded soon after the start and all through the stretch” when he was riding a heavy favorite.¹¹⁰ These crowding tactics continued to stifle Lee’s record. He began to develop concerns over discrimination on the track. There was “a great deal of talk about the white riders having banded together to ‘do’ Lee. While there may be no grounds for such talk, it has reached the negro boy’s ears and he gives every evidence of fright when in any sort of close quarters.”¹¹¹ Lee also developed a habit of claiming fouls against other riders when he was bullied. After claiming that jockey Joe Notter had deliberately fouled him in May 1908, the patrol judge stated that there was no evidence to uphold the claim (see Figure 3).¹¹² Despite there being no grounds to claim a clan of riders banding together, it was reported the next day that “jockey Lee is having a tough time of it among the white riders of the east. Dugan and Musgrave have harried him most, and Miller is expected to help from now on. Lee is a fighter himself, and that does not make matters easier.”¹¹³ It is notable that of the five jockeys in

¹⁰⁸ “Black Star Shines,” *Louisville Times*, June 6, 1907.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ “More Rough Riding at Latonia,” *Daily Racing Form*, June 27, 1907.

¹¹¹ “Restigouche Gains Fame: Wins the New Rochelle Handicap and Sets a New American Record,” *Daily Racing Form*, May 30, 1908.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ “Notes of the Turf,” *Daily Racing Form*, May 31, 1908.

the race where Lee claimed a foul against Notter, two of the other jockeys were Musgrave and Eddie Dugan, those who had been hounding him the most.¹¹⁴



Figure 3: Charles R. Ellison presenting the Heaslip Cup to Jockey Joe Notter at the City Park Race Track in New Orleans on February 1, 1908

Credit: Keeneland-Cook Collection, Keeneland Library

During the late stages of his career, Lee began to receive fines as he became more aggressive on the track. During a race in Oakland, Lee and jockey Kirschbaum, while riding the two leading horses, began to duel each other with their whips. This not only led to fines for the two jockeys, but their distraction allowed another horse to pass them on the outside and win the race. Lee's horse, Bon Homme, was the dominant betting horse, carrying "a small fortune in

¹¹⁴ "New York Form Chart: Third Race," *Daily Racing Form*, May 30, 1908.

wagers.” Lee’s whip tactics were the end of Bon Homme’s chances though, leading to “a storm of hisses from the spectators.”¹¹⁵ The fines were minimal compared to the punishment meted out to a steeplechase jockey who engaged in a whip duel previously; the \$50 fine that Lee and Kirschbaum each received was nothing compared to steeplechase jockey E. Morrison’s thirty day suspension for dueling.¹¹⁶

It is likely that Lee’s shift to the Canadian tracks in mid-1909 was a result of this track discrimination, although it should be noted that most American states, including Louisiana, had by this time banned race-track gambling and effectively, horse racing. Jockeys would often race against the same competitors at most of their meets, so it is significant that Lee was racing against a mostly different group of jockeys at these tracks; Musgrave was the only one of Lee’s usual harassers who shared the Canadian circuit with him. It seems simple to conclude that the prohibition of racetrack gambling in many states led to the closure of tracks and Lee’s move to the Canadian circuit, but this does not explain the situation entirely. Through the summer of 1909, the top jockeys in the country (i.e. Vincent Powers, the best rider in the country, and Eddie Dugan, among others) were all racing the New York circuit, from Sheepshead Bay to Saratoga. With Lee’s record, he should have been among them on that profitable circuit. A good segment of those jockeys, however, were his main tormentors. They were still racing in New York when

¹¹⁵ “Jockeys Duel with Whips: Lee and Kirschbaum Treat Oakland’s Patrons to an Unusual Spectacle,” *Daily Racing Form*, December 30, 1908.

¹¹⁶ “Jockey Morrison to Quit Turf,” *Daily Racing Form*, June 8, 1907.

Jimmy Lee moved down to the Kentucky circuit, racing at Churchill Downs in late September 1909 alongside fellow black jockey Dale Austin.¹¹⁷

Of greater impact on Jimmy Lee's racing style was his history of injury. Lee experienced very few injuries in 1907, keeping himself in excellent shape. It was not until the end of the year that he had to sit out because of an injury, a wounded leg from a spill on December 10, 1907. On a heavy track – that is, an extremely wet one – struggle for position at the half-mile post led to a number of mud and dirt clods being thrown around, blinding multiple riders and forcing four mounts to the ground. The crowd at the New Orleans Fair Grounds was “in a high state of excitement in fear of several of the riders... having sustained fatal injuries,” but thankfully, all four riders survived. Two were merely shaken up, while the first rider to fall sustained internal injuries and Lee received severe bruising and a long laceration on his leg from the flailing of the fallen horses.¹¹⁸ He rode only ten mounts over the next two weeks, only one of which he rode in the money, placing third. Lee had other horses to be engaged, but he was unable to fulfill most of those engagements as his leg became sore, and his physician advised him to take a few more days off.¹¹⁹ Another major injury at the Kentucky Derby on May 5, 1908, would curtail his riding career. Lee had the mount on Lillian Ray in the second race of the day, but a jam just

¹¹⁷ “Louisville Form Chart,” *Daily Racing Form*, September 28, 1909. Despite his career extending beyond Lee's, Austin never won any major races besides the Kentucky Oaks and Latonia Oaks, in 1905 and 1906 respectively, both the year before Jimmy Lee won them.

¹¹⁸ “More Heavy Track Racing: Slow Time and Accidents Mark the Sport at New Orleans,” *Daily Racing Form*, December 11, 1907.

¹¹⁹ “Light Note's Last Start: Old Race Runs Away, Breaks a Leg and is Destroyed,” *Daily Racing Form*, December 21, 1907.

outside the post caused Lillian Ray to fall, throwing Lee and injuring his shoulder.¹²⁰ Lee was unable to ride in the Kentucky Derby race because of the accident, “smothering the hopes” of his mount’s owner, Barney Dreyfuss, who “thought he would have a chance with Jimmy Lee up.”¹²¹ While the *Louisville Herald* wrote that “nothing serious is expected to result” from the fall, Lee was still feeling the effects a week later as he was “riding under difficulties at Churchill Downs, and can scarcely lift his right arm over his head.”¹²² Lee would continue to race, but his performance after this injury would decline dramatically.¹²³

Given the rough riding which haunted him and his assessment that he was being ganged up on, Lee likely had developed a fear of injury as indicated by some of his tactics during later races. During a race in Oakland, he lost on the “almost invulnerable Jeanne d’Arc” when “she was pulled up sharply and lost second place.” Questioned as to why he did so, Lee stated that jockey Butler was riding “so close that he was forced to pull up to avoid going over the inner fence.”¹²⁴ Lee’s situation is likely similar to that of jockey Delaby, who after a fall at City Park in New Orleans, “absolutely refuses to take a chance at guiding his mount through an opening

¹²⁰ The Louisville Form Chart erroneously lists Lee as the jockey on Bill Herron during the Kentucky Derby (fourth race of the day), but this is an error as Lee cancelled the rest of his mounts for the day after being thrown.

¹²¹ *Louisville Courier-Journal*, May 6, 1908.

¹²² *Louisville Herald*, May 6, 1908.; “Notes of the Turf,” *The Daily Racing Form*, May 14, 1908.

¹²³ Lee had rode 392 mounts as of May 2, 1908, winning with 62 of them for a 16% winning percentage. The remaining eight months of the year (May 2 through December 26) saw Lee ride 372 mounts with only 52 winners for a 14% winning percentage. Not only does the winning percentage drop, but the number of mounts he held in the first four months of the year is barely more than the number he held in the remaining eight months of the year.

¹²⁴ “Hanbridge Scores Again: Defeats Collector Jessup and Jeanne D’Arc in a Fast Run Race,” *Daily Racing Form*, December 18, 1908. Butler confirmed Lee’s statement by calling his mount a “pronounced rail runner.”

when it is probable that he will be jostled or bumped in doing so.”¹²⁵ Lee faced a barrage of psychic and physical violence on the track that only increased as he became more famous. The speed that characterized his racing style led to a greater potential for injury when he was run into the pack or the rail. The overt attacks he endured on and off the track, in addition to his increased timidity in the saddle made it less likely that Lee would receive mounts. The bureaucratic indifference and tacit consent of the Jockey Club for the rough riding tactics turned both Lee and the horses he rode into targets. Lee’s ability to receive *favored* mounts was further limited by the influence of money on the sport because turfmen preferred to protect their investments. Any of Lee’s late career victories relied mostly on his ability to drive the horse rather than on the ability of the horse itself. Lee’s experience demonstrates the influence of Jim Crow, the modern ideals of the sport promoted by the Jockey Club, and the reformist spirit which limited the opportunities for horsemen as the key aspects that contributed to the disappearance of the black jockey.

Aspects of Lee’s experience can be seen in histories of the black horsemen on the turf, all trying to identify why the black jockey disappeared. David Wiggins claims that white jockeys formed “anticolored unions” and began to drive black riders off the track in the 1890s.¹²⁶ Unfortunately, Wiggins cannot sustain his claim with evidence relating to the track, but he uses examples from other sports leagues to show the united efforts of racism. In New Orleans, for example, the cyclists of the League of American Wheelmen threatened to leave in the 1890s because the league admitted black members in the North.¹²⁷ Arthur Ashe, Jr., seconds the charge

¹²⁵ “Another Stake for Fizer: His Al Muller Runs Away with the Crescent City Stakes,” *Daily Racing Form*, December 15, 1907.

¹²⁶ Wiggins, 32.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

of racism, claiming that “the Jockey Club was formed in 1894 to license riders, and they systematically denied the relisting of blacks. The ebony-skinned riders were just too good and made too much money to suit the whites in charge.”¹²⁸ Charles Parmer also agrees, stating that “the white boys retaliated by ganging up against the black riders on the rails. A black boy would be pocketed, thrust back in a race; or his mount would be bumped out of contention on a white boy’s stirrup, and toss him out of the saddle.”¹²⁹ Parmer also noted that “those white fellows would slash out and cut the nearest Negro rider,” such that “they literally ran the black boys off the track.”¹³⁰ As the African-American jockeys were literally crowded out of the field, it became more difficult for them to receive contracts, or better terms on their contracts, because the owners knew that the system was doing nothing to protect the jockeys. When African-American jockeys spoke out against the aggressive tactics of the white jockeys, they were denounced by the Jockey Clubs and forced out of the sport, as in the case of Leroy Williams. Williams had trouble winning many races by 1907 as he had “to steer clear of the ‘pockets’ and snares that the white boys set.”¹³¹ The racial motivations were ignored by newspapers like the *Washington Post* which instead applied theories of Social Darwinism, viewing the “white jockeys’ superior intelligence” as the reason why the “negro rider [was] on [the] wane.”¹³² These anecdotes only

¹²⁸ Ashe, 50.; While Ashe’s history has factual errors strewn throughout, this statement is somewhat accurate, if hyperbolic.

¹²⁹ Charles Parmer, *For Gold and Glory* (New York: Carrick & Evans, 1939), 150.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹³¹ “Few Negro Jockeys Left,” *Washington Post*. January 11, 1907.

¹³² “Negro Rider on Wane: White Jockeys’ Superior Intelligence Supersedes,” *Washington Post*, August 20, 1905.

provide one aspect of the story though. The modernizing influences of the sport and the reformist elements were just as important as racism and violence in why the black jockey disappeared.

Antebellum Southern white turfmen were content in their domination of black slave horsemen that they could allow them numerous privileges without lessening their own authority. Any slave success on the track would belong to them and affect their social standings. Thus the world of white turfmen was dependent upon the subordination and labor of black men. After emancipation, white turfmen tried to control the message still, practicing disavowal of black talent, in their “simultaneous acknowledging and denying an event,” as a way to “reject its relevance, knowing full well that it occurred.”¹³³ They acknowledged the existence of black talent in horse racing, but denied that black horsemen’s achievements meant anything other than upholding racial hierarchies. Isaac Murphy’s success, but more importantly, the manner in which he achieved it, forced Southerners to rethink their worldview. Fearing that they could no longer control the yearning for respect and dignity that diffused from Murphy to the African-American community, white turfmen in the north and south reconciled their differences and forced the black turfmen out of the visible track roles. As Ray Stannard Baker eloquently noted, white southern men “want the New South, but the Old Negro.”¹³⁴ The fears of Southern white men about the implications of black success on the track did not just reflect how they viewed African-Americans, but also revealed insecurities regarding their own place in society in a rapidly modernizing and urbanizing world. The class conflicts and realignments that occurred in white Southern society, in addition to the modernization and industrialization of the South, helped unite turfmen nationally.

¹³³ Neil Roberts, *Freedom as Marronage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 29.

¹³⁴ Baker, *Color Line*, 44.

**CHAPTER TWO:
A BETTER BREED OF HORSES:
CLASS CONFLICT, MODERNIZATION, AND THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF
HORSE RACING**

On the day after the ninety-fifth anniversary of Henry Clay's birth, the Clay monument located on Canal Street, where it intersected St. Charles Avenue and Royal Street, was the centerpoint of a vibrant scene in New Orleans.¹ But the throngs gathered around the monument on Saturday, April 13, 1872, were not there to pay tribute to Clay. The open nature of the circular carriageway surrounding the monument was designed to maximize the visibility of the commemorative statue on the major thoroughfare.² As such, the Louisiana Jockey Club designated it as the waypoint for all those heading to its inaugural race meeting at the New Orleans Fair Grounds. Drove of carriages and street cars loitered around the monument, ferrying passengers to the track with "cars leaving from Clay Statue every five minutes during the races."³ Novelist George Washington Cable remarked that on Canal Street one could see both "the gay carriage-parties turn northwestward scurrying away to the races" as well as "the gambler [who] seeks whom he may induce to walk around into his parlor in the Rue Royale or St. Charles Street."⁴ Journalist Charles Henry White added that "race track touts, bookmakers, jockeys," and "commercial travelers" are also among those the visitor might see on Canal Street.⁵ Clay's monument served as an appropriate location because of his legacy of breeding

¹ The statue was installed in 1863 and has since been relocated, moving in 1900 to Lafayette Square so Canal Street could accommodate more street car traffic.

² "The Clay Monument," *Times-Picayune*, March 20, 1856, afternoon edition.

³ Louis J. Hennessey, *Diamond Jubilee: The Fair Grounds, New Orleans, Season 1947-1948*. New Orleans: New Orleans Fair Grounds Corporation, 1948, 10.

⁴ George Washington Cable, *The Creoles of Louisiana* (London: John C. Nimmo, 1885), 268.

⁵ Charles Henry White, "New Orleans," *Harper's Monthly Magazine* (December 1906): 121.

horses at his Ashland Plantation, as well as his proclivity for gambling. John Quincy Adams remarked that “in politics, as in private life, Clay is essentially a Gamester.”⁶ This location was even more apt given Clay’s economic program, the American System, which was intended to unite the nation through economic development and specialization, a process that was also occurring in the world of the turf by 1872.

Subscribing to a growing national standard in order to attract Northern sportsmen and capital, a rising class of professional sportsmen changed the nature of the Southern system of racing. The attempts by the planter aristocracy in the postbellum period to restore the glory of New Orleans racing served to advance the prospects of a burgeoning component of the middle class: the professional sportsman. This sportsman was born of the “culture of chance,” considered by historian Jackson Lears to be one of the driving forces of post-Civil War American society, and identified as a “culture more at ease with randomness and irrationality, more doubtful that diligence is the only path to success,” reaffirmed and magnified by the Civil War.⁷ The destruction wrought by the Civil War did not harm this risk-driven culture. Instead, it created vast opportunities to be exploited as “the unsettled economy offered unprecedented rewards for risk” since “the culture of chance continued to draw legitimacy from the indiscipline of the market.”⁸ The men successfully benefitting from the commercial culture in New Orleans were not the old plantation elite but entrepreneurs, professional gamblers, and professional sportsmen, among others. These professional turfmen implemented more democratic ideals that modernized the Southern racing circuit, distancing it from the antebellum era when racing

⁶ Merrill D. Peterson, *The Great Triumvirate: Webster, Clay, and Calhoun* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 381.

⁷ T.J. Jackson Lears, *Something for Nothing: Luck in America* (New York: Viking, 2003), 6.

⁸ Lears, 149-150.

constituted an extension of elite Southern honor. The professionalization and modernization of horse racing by the turfmen after 1865 demonstrates the integration of New Orleans into the national economy, enlisting the promises of the New South to accomplish their goals. Just as Clay's American System advocated an economic connection throughout the nation, so too did the turfmen reconnect New Orleans to the nation through the sport of horse racing.

As with the experience of African-Americans in Louisianan horse racing, the context for the changing status of horse owners and turfmen begins with the Old South. In the antebellum period, racing in New Orleans was primarily the pastime of the white planter aristocracy. For the horse owners, there was little financial incentive to win races as the purses were small, but there was an intense competition to prove oneself the better horse breeder. The planters considered themselves "amateur sportsmen," as their participation was based on rituals of honor, pride in their accomplishments, and the love of the game. They contrasted themselves against the much-reviled "professional sportsman, who participated in sports based on shows of wealth, profit in their accomplishments, and the love of money. Money did serve a purpose to the antebellum planter aristocracy, but they did not participate in the world of the turf out of financial motives. For the men of the antebellum iteration of the Metairie Jockey Club, horse racing and gambling provided a method of muting rivalries and defending Southern honor. As historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown describes, "money in the context of the game or sport served as a means to ratify obligation and deference, not to terminate them, no matter how cheerily the winnings jangled in the pockets of the bettor."⁹ Historian T.H. Breen, in a study of colonial Virginia, also argues that even though betting allowed the planters to "openly [express] their extreme competitiveness,

⁹ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (1982; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 340.

winning temporary emblematic victories over their rivals,” it still served to reduce the “dangerous, but often inevitable social tensions” inherent in a colonial plantation society, “without thereby threatening the social tranquility of Virginia.”¹⁰ Not to take part in this community of men would be seen as anti-social and set one apart from the community. Racing was unique, though, in the way that it merged the recreation of the upper classes with that of the masses, allowing it to serve as a performance of social power. “An intensely shared interest,” in horse racing and other sports among a community, “crossing but not leveling social distinctions, has powerful effects in transmitting style and reinforcing the leadership of the elite that controls proceedings and excels in the display.”¹¹ Beginning with the turfmen of the Southern planter aristocracy, the track was an “institution that defined who they were or who they wished to become,” establishing their belief in “the necessity of hierarchy to make a great and modern United States and how hard they were willing to work to protect social divisions and inequalities.”¹²

The world of antebellum horse racing as described by Wyatt-Brown and Breen certainly fit Adelman’s characteristics of the premodern ideal sporting type. The competition was generally local in nature, with very few dedicated sporting journals and newspapers reporting on most of the contests.¹³ With no enduring record of the race for posterity, the significance of honor in these games was amplified since it was “relayed to the ephemerality of the glory

¹⁰ T.H. Breen, “Horses and Gentlemen: The Cultural Significance of Gambling among the Gentry of Virginia,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser. 34 (April 1977): 257.

¹¹ Rhys Isaac, “Evangelical Revolt: The Nature of the Baptists’ Challenge to the Traditional Order in Virginia, 1765 to 1775,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 31, no. 3, 3rd (July 1974): 351.

¹² Katherine C. Mooney, *Race Horse Men: How Slavery and Freedom Were Made at the Racetrack* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 3-6.

¹³ *Spirit of the Times* was a general exception, as a national periodical established in 1837.

attached to winning. To delay payment robbed the winner of the immediate gratification of his trophy, the emblematic value of which lasted only as long as public memory of the occasion.”¹⁴ There was also little role differentiation between players and spectators. The men of the Metairie Jockey Club, demonstrating the greater fluidity of roles on the track, transitioned between participant and spectator easily and were just as likely to ride their own horses as they were to have jockeys ride them. In the areas of organization and rules, the Metairie Jockey Club was already moving toward the modern ideal sporting type, as a formal organization with a codified rulebook. Unlike the later formulation, at this time, club racing was primarily a local affair, inconsistent with other regional clubs in organization and rules. One of the rules that varied depending on region regarded the length and style of the race. No consistency existed between races, and distance varied widely, as horses ran multiple heats of one to four miles.¹⁵ Variations in rules between locales therefore forced the planters to breed their horses not only for speed, but also for endurance. Betting was also a local, private matter between two people. Professional gamblers did exist, but on average, the gentlemen’s bets outnumbered those of the professional, and few gentlemen would consent to accept a professional’s bet. Some trends toward the modern ideal were beginning to occur as early as the 1850s, but they were not internal shifts, instead implemented by men outside of the Southern gentry.

One of the men integral in moving the New Orleans tracks toward the modern ideal was Northern racing promoter, Richard Ten Broeck. The great eastern races began to decline in the 1840s because of the influence of anti-gambling reformers and the temperance movement. The northern and eastern horsemen sought new areas to continue racing, luckily arriving in the lower

¹⁴ Wyatt-Brown, 345.

¹⁵ Heats were the method used by the racing organizers to maximize the number of races they could get per day from a small stock of horses.

Mississippi during the height of antebellum development in the Louisiana sugar region.¹⁶ In the 1850s, New Orleans became the new leader of the turf, known as the “horse-racing capital of the nation” with five tracks open during the winter season.¹⁷ The Metairie Course, built in 1838, was the most successful of the early New Orleans tracks. Its success fluctuated over the following years, so in 1851, the owners of the track hired Richard Ten Broeck, a New York promoter, to supervise the Metairie track. Ten Broeck recognized opportunity in New Orleans and used his connections on the track to raise his own social profile. His modifications would be instrumental in establishing many of the modern influences in New Orleans, but his role as a professional sportsman put him at odds with the Southern gentry and their emphasis on honor culture.

Born in Albany, New York, in 1812, Richard Ten Broeck, after an unsuccessful year at West Point, resolved to start a career in horse racing. He ignored the traditional racing circles in New York, New Jersey, and the upper South, setting his eyes on the banks of the Mississippi River to make his mark on the turf. Natchez politician and turfman Adam L. Bingaman hired Ten Broeck in 1848 to manage his newly-established Bingaman Course, across the river from New Orleans. From there, he was promoted to manager of the Metairie Course under the auspices of the Metairie Association, a joint-stock company that purchased a controlling interest in the track.¹⁸ Ten Broeck’s methods improved the national prestige of New Orleans racing, turning the Metairie into a prominent track that attracted leading stables of the North and upper South. He

¹⁶ J. Carlyle Sitterson, “The William J. Minor Plantations: A Study in Ante-Bellum Absentee Ownership,” *Journal of Southern History* 9, no. 1 (February 1943): 59.

¹⁷ There were other courses in Louisiana, such as the Lecompte Race Course in Shreveport and the later Caddo Race Track, but their races were not well-attended nor financial successes. The western Louisiana revival of horse racing would not occur until the opening of Louisiana Downs in 1974. Katherine Brash Jeter, “A Racing Heritage,” *Louisiana History* 30, no. 1 (Winter 1989): 11.

¹⁸ John Dizikes, *Sportsmen and Gamesmen* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002 [1981]), 142-144.

improved the track, built new stables to house more horses, increased the size of purses through the contributions of local merchants and businessmen, and rebuilt the grandstand, adding embellishments like parlors in the ladies' stand. Despite the massive success of his additions, he still struggled for complete acceptance, and "in New Orleans, as elsewhere, the dramatic pattern of Ten Broeck's life was that of the outsider, alone, pitting his judgment and nerve against everybody else's in duels in which the weapons were horses."¹⁹

The most famous of Ten Broeck's "horse duels" was also one of the most famous horse races in New Orleans – the classic rivalry between the two great horses, Lexington and Lecomte. In their first match-up in the Great Post Stakes, twenty thousand people, including former President Millard Fillmore, witnessed these two famous horses race at the Metairie Course on April 1, 1854. Thomas J. Wells ran Lecomte, representing Mississippi against Richard Ten Broeck's horse, Lexington, representing Kentucky.²⁰ Lexington won two straight four-mile heats over Lecomte that day. Wells requested a rematch, confident that his horse would prove its worth in another race, and entered Lecomte to race again the following week. "As a shareholder in the Metairie Course, [Ten Broeck] stood to gain a hefty sum in gate receipts from a rematch," and was inclined to accept Well's offer.²¹ But Ten Broeck was only a part-owner of Lexington, and the other partners preferred to rest the horse after such a grueling match. In a move that would

¹⁹ Ibid., 145.

²⁰ Both horses were half-brothers. Some of Lexington's famous progeny include Preakness (the namesake of the Triple Crown race at Pimlico Downs), Kentucky (owned by William Travers and winner of the first Travers Stakes in 1864), and Cincinnati (the favorite horse of Ulysses S. Grant). Lecomte represented the state of Mississippi in the Great Post race, but was actually born and bred in Louisiana. Dale Somers misstates Lecomte's state of representation in his *Rise of Sports in New Orleans, 1850-1900*, claiming that Lecomte represented Louisiana. Duncan F. Kenner's horse Arrow was actually the participant for Louisiana. Somers, *Rise of Sports*, 31.

²¹ Mooney, 92.

only encourage later accusations that he was a gamester, emphasizing personal profit, Ten Broeck proceeded to buy out his partners and returned Lexington to the training track. Historian John Dizikes concurs in that assessment, asserting that even though Lexington seemed unfit for a second race so soon, Ten Broeck had “a gambler's talent for building the pot.”²² He “must have calculated that he was not really risking much. If [Lexington] won, his owner would have to look for new opponents; but if he lost, a third and payoff meeting would be set up. Ten Broeck might actually gain more by losing.”²³

Thomas J. Wells wanted to ensure his victory in the rematch. Advised by fellow planter William J. Minor, Wells hired the slave trainer Hark, known for his expertise in preparing horses. Wells then went to fellow Louisianan Duncan F. Kenner and hired out Kenner's slave jockey, Abe, known for a wild competitive spirit on the New Orleans and Natchez tracks. Facing his rival again on April 8, 1854, now jockeyed by Abe and trained by Hark, Lecomte avenged his earlier defeat and won two heats over Lexington. The first was only by a slim margin, though Lecomte set a four-mile record of seven minutes, twenty-six seconds in that race. The second race established a slower time, but a greater margin of victory.²⁴ Ten Broeck vehemently argued that Lexington would have won if his jockey had not mistakenly pulled up at the three-mile mark, misjudging the race distance. Challenging Lecomte to a final match to determine true superiority, Ten Broeck attempted to convince Wells to assent to the race. Wells consistently

²² Dizikes, 149.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Due to the inconsistencies in rules and regulations that existed in the premodern sporting ideal, numerous Northern critics denied that Lecomte held the record because he did not carry as much weight as specified by some Northern turf rules. In their mind, the regional rules variations placed an asterisk on the “record” held by Lecomte. Somers, *Rise of Sports*, 31.

refused the challenge, and the two men took to the pages of the *Spirit of the Times* as their arguments grew increasingly bitter. Ten Broeck decided to goad Wells by putting up \$10,000 that Lexington, running solely against the clock, could beat Lecomte's record time. On April 2, 1855, Lexington sustained his claim, demolishing Lecomte's record at Metairie and shaving six seconds off the latter horse's time. Having been called out in that manner, Wells could no longer ignore Ten Broeck's challenge; the third, and ultimate, race was scheduled for April 14, two weeks later. It was no contest, however, and Lexington ran away with victory over a thoroughly outclassed Lecomte. It was this third race that supported Wells' belief that Lecomte had been drugged and led to the subsequent investigation by Wells, Minor, and Kenner into the lives of the black horsemen.

Despite the improvements that Ten Broeck established at Metairie and his role in one of the greatest rivalries of the Old South, the Southern planter aristocracy still did not accept the Albany sportsman as one of their fraternity. Ten Broeck's profit motives in the Lexington-Lecomte series, along with the fact that as a professional, he "lived on what he made as a gamesman at the track," did not endear him to the Southern gentry who viewed themselves as amateur sportsmen.²⁵ To them, Ten Broeck was not a "high minded liberal gentleman, attached to amusements regardless of loss or gain," but rather a "socially despised" gamester.²⁶ Ten Broeck retired Lexington to stud soon after the last race with Lecomte, then purchased the latter horse from Wells. Parting ways with the Metairie Jockey Club by 1856, Ten Broeck crossed the Atlantic with a stable full of horses to try and dominate the British turf with what he thought to be a superior breed of horse. His departure from the Metairie club and his falling out with the

²⁵ Dizikes, 156.

²⁶ Harriet Martineau, *Society in America*, 1:157. Quoted in Wyatt-Brown, 346.

Metairie planters was partly because of a personality clash, seen in vicious attacks by the two men in the turf newspapers, as well as Ten Broeck's rejection of ideals of Southern honor. The schism was exacerbated in mid-1857 when Ten Broeck wrote an open letter in a sporting journal calling out former Governor and President of the Club, Paul Octave Hebert, and William J. Minor, accusing them of conspiring to impede his stable's progress because they had "always [attempted] to deny and calumniate the pedigrees, performances, and reputation of [Ten Broeck's] horses."²⁷

Richard Ten Broeck thus embodied the professional sportsman to the Southern gentlemen of New Orleans, but the changes he implemented at Metairie and in the sport presaged the modern trends that would follow during the reconstruction of the southern turf. He was a self-promoter and made use of telegraph technology to broadcast the news of Lexington's races. Lexington's earnings were published in newspapers too, and people eagerly discussed the \$56,000 that Lexington won throughout his career.²⁸ The scheme to coerce Thomas Wells into agreeing to a final race by racing Lexington against the clock and beating Lecomte's record was an impressive strategy. Dizikes considers the "showmanship of the huge bet staked on breaking the world's record" to be brilliant in that "it wasn't a private bet, it was a public event. It became as much the focus of talk as the horses and their races."²⁹ In many respects, Ten Broeck's strategy can be read as a "pseudo-event," to use Daniel Boorstin's phrase – a media event for the

²⁷ "R. Ten Broeck to W.J. Minor," *Porter's Spirit of the Times*, August 8, 1857, 363.; Ten Broeck had to receive certification from the Metairie Jockey Club regarding his horses to prove their eligibility for the British turf. In writing their certificate regarding one horse, Pryor, the gentlemen of the Metairie Jockey Club neglected to include the most defining characteristic of a white blaze across its forehead. Pryor was then ruled off the track by the English turf authorities until Ten Broeck was able to verify its identity and age through additional correspondence with the Metairie Club.

²⁸ Dizikes, 148-149.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 149.

sake of gaining public attention.³⁰ In addition, by using the clock as the opponent in such a publicized event, it was a giant leap toward the establishment of speed alone as the measure of a horse's achievement, not endurance. The modern-thinking turfman was not a new phenomenon after the Civil War, but had long been present in some capacity in the Southern world of horse racing. It was not until the diminished power of the planter aristocracy in the postbellum years, however, that the rising professional turfman was able to gain enough power to reshape the sport.

William Minor, like many other slaveholders in the deep South, aligned himself with Whig politics. Any political issue was viewed through his role as both slaveholder and sugar planter. The most important policies for him included preserving slavery and imposing a protective tariff on sugar. Minor "firmly opposed secession, not only because he was deeply attached to the Union, but also because he was convinced that such an act would be disastrous to the sugar industry of the South."³¹ This view was prevalent among most of the planter aristocracy who were invested in the world of the Southern turf. In Natchez, as well as in Louisiana, these men had extensive Northern and foreign investments in addition to their mercantile, manufacturing, and banking interests.³² Thomas J. Wells's brother, James Madison Wells, who would become the Reconstruction governor of Louisiana and another Louisiana race horse man, actively opposed secession, even leading a "band of Unionist guerillas that attacked

³⁰ Daniel Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*, 25th Anniv. Ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1992 [1961]).

³¹ Sitterson, "William J. Minor," 61.

³² Edwin Adams Davis and William Ransom Hogan, *The Barber of Natchez* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), 216-217.

Confederate train wagons.”³³ With war on the horizon, the *Spirit of the Times* urged that it was in the best interests for Southern men of the turf to avoid bloodshed.

But the war came. When war seemed inevitable, Southern turfmen generally changed their attitudes toward the war. In an expression of the patriotic fervor of some Confederates in Louisiana, one race track attendee conveyed his joy at seeing a Virginia horse lose to an underdog at the New Orleans track, saying that it was a just punishment for Virginia’s lateness in declaring war. There were early hopes of the continuation of racing in the South. The *Charleston Daily Courier* reported in 1862 that a Confederate alternative to New York’s *Spirit of the Times* would soon commence publication, claiming it would be “much needed at the South, as soon as we achieve our independence.”³⁴ These hopes were soon dashed though, and the Metairie Jockey Club cancelled its 1862 meet when Union troops were moving towards New Orleans. The city fell to Federal occupation several weeks later.

The swift Union capture of New Orleans in April 1862 led to an extended occupation and martial law administered by Major General Benjamin Butler, whose occupation force attempted to alter the leisure habits of New Orleans. To bring the lenient Sabbath standards in New Orleans in line with those of New England, Butler’s successor, General Nathaniel Banks, in December 1864 implemented General Orders Number 179 that outlawed attendance at “Theaters, Billiard Rooms, and other places of amusement on Sunday.”³⁵ The Federal troops enforced these orders during the occupation, but they did not permanently alter the traditions of leisure in New

³³ Frank Joseph Wetta, *The Louisiana Scalawags: Politics, Race, and Terrorism during the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 36.

³⁴ “The South Carolina Jockey Club,” *Charleston Daily Courier*, February 5, 1862.

³⁵ Somers, *Rise of Sports*, 77.

Orleans. When Federal troops finally left the city, their efforts to purify the morality of New Orleans were quickly disregarded. To many Southerners, leisure was to be their escape from the stresses of occupation.

The prestige that the New Orleans tracks enjoyed in the 1850s disappeared with the onset of hostilities. Many antebellum race horses served as Confederate cavalry mounts. The horses that were not conscripted into service were not assured of safety. The Federal occupation and seizure of war contraband from the planters devastated the local infrastructure for racing. Duncan Kenner and William Minor were the two largest turfmen who lost their Louisiana plantation and racing assets. Kenner's stables were raided by Federal troops in August 1862, and they confiscated every horse, with the exception of Whale, a Thoroughbred so wild that they left him behind when they were unable to restrain him. Minor's plantation, Waterloo, was raided next, though he would eventually have most of his confiscated property returned to him. His horses, however, never returned to Waterloo, having been shipped up north to be auctioned off for the purposes of improving the northern stock with their noble blood lines.³⁶ The greatest damage to the Southern turf was not the loss of the aristocratic Thoroughbred blood lines, but the loss of the skilled labor of slave horsemen who trained, exercised, and rode them. Racing in Louisiana and the South was almost entirely halted during the Civil War, though it did continue in Kentucky and the Northern states.

The confiscation of wealth, property, and land from the planter aristocracy of Louisiana dealt a major blow to the power of the Southern turfmen. The war also devastated Louisiana's financial and agricultural sectors, but unlike neighboring states, Louisiana lacked outside capital and investment to revive the economy. The "state's notorious political instability [frightened] off

³⁶ Ibid., 79.

many potential investors during Reconstruction,” and “New Orleans elites continued to resist the importation of northern capital.”³⁷ The *Times-Picayune* expressed this stubborn attitude, arguing in 1878 that the independent spirit of Louisiana “can save herself, and stand alone, without a dollar of capital from other states.”³⁸ As early as 1866 though, the *Times-Picayune* wrote (with no sense of irony) that “the great influx of strangers to our city is one of the principal reasons that our amusement resorts are nightly filled,” amusements that included “gambling hells.”³⁹ In a message that the turfmen took to heart, a writer for *Wilkes’ Spirit of the Times* mused that perhaps racing “was to be a means rather than an effect of recuperation at the South.”⁴⁰

Sports in New Orleans often highlighted the class tensions that divided the state. Horse racing was unique in this regard because it merged the recreation of the upper classes with that of the masses. From Reconstruction through the fin de siècle, the formation of multiple jockey clubs offered Louisianans differing visions of how racing might be organized in the city. Antebellum planters and Southern horsemen reactivated the Metairie Jockey Club in 1865. Its leaders included Governor James Madison Wells and former Governor Paul Octave Hebert. After his service as governor, from 1856 to 1860, Hebert returned to his sugar plantation and his role as president of the Metairie Jockey Club, where he remained for “several years before and many after the war.”⁴¹ Although the club met with initial success, demonstrating the desire of the

³⁷ Scott P. Marler, *The Merchants’ Capital: New Orleans and the Political Economy of the Nineteenth-Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 228.

³⁸ (New Orleans) *Times-Picayune*, January 6, 1878. Quoted in Marler, 228.

³⁹ *Times-Picayune*, January 7, 1866.

⁴⁰ *Wilkes’ Spirit of the Times*, XVIII, May 9, 1868, 194.

⁴¹ Albert Leonce Dupont, “The Career of Paul Octave Hebert, Governor of Louisiana, 1853-1856,” *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 31, no. 2, repr. (April 1948): 37.

people to return to normalcy, the club was unable to prosper. The lack of strong local stables from which to draw horses was a major detriment to the club's success. The Metairie Jockey Club, drawing most of its membership from the antebellum planter class, sought to reconstruct the racial and class hierarchies that they feared were being undermined by the psychic pains of Southern defeat. They segregated their grandstands into three distinct sections: one for club members, one for ladies, and one for general admission – including black spectators – thereby, reinforcing class standing and protecting the virtues of southern white womanhood. These older members took a conservative view of the sport, believing that racing should remain under the rule of the elites and the performance of the races would “[reinforce] the leadership of the elite that controls proceedings and excels in the display.”⁴² The younger members of the club disagreed with that view and saw the future of racing in wider marketing to all classes of society. While both factions believed the race track would be a means to restore New Orleans to its former glory by reconstructing their ideal society through track policies, the methods they advocated to achieve that goal differed. Comparable to the problems identified by E. Digby Baltzell in his analysis of white Anglo-Saxon Protestant elites and power structures, the failings of the Metairie Jockey Club came from their “unwillingness, or inability, to share and improve its upper-class traditions by continually absorbing talented and distinguished members of minority groups into its privileged ranks.”⁴³ These divisions intensified, leading to a schism in 1871 over the membership application of Charles T. Howard.

⁴² Isaac, 351.

⁴³ E. Digby Baltzell, *The Protestant Establishment: Aristocracy and Caste in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987 [1964]), x.

Howard founded and served as president of the Louisiana Lottery Company, the corporation that ran one of the only legal lotteries in the United States, raking in fortunes for its organizers. As the chief officer of the lottery, Howard developed relationships with key Republican lawmakers to ensure the exclusivity and continued existence of the Louisiana Lottery, since lotteries were falling under state prohibition elsewhere. Part of Howard's strategy was "investing" a portion of the profits in certain state legislators, giving bribes for assurances that the lottery would remain legal. The close connections Howard formed with the state's Reconstruction-era Republican Party led the older members of the Metairie Jockey Club to snub him, deriding him as both a carpetbagger and a scalawag.⁴⁴ Howard vowed to bury the Metairie course for the slight, and he formed the rival Louisiana Jockey Club which drew away many younger members from the Metairie Jockey Club. In 1872, Howard purchased the grounds of the Metairie Course and turned it into the Metairie Cemetery, literally burying the racetrack of the Metairie Jockey Club.⁴⁵ Purchasing the New Orleans Fair Grounds for its home turf, the Louisiana Jockey Club argued for a noble democratic foundation of the sport, stating that the "racing interests of the South cannot be subservient to any little clique of people."

⁴⁴ Howard was originally from Baltimore, but he claimed war service for the Confederacy.

⁴⁵ Most newspaper accounts and histories of the period recall the story in this way. One oddity though is Craig Bauer's biography of Duncan Farrar Kenner. Bauer does not once mention Charles Howard or the Louisiana Lottery Company, instead claiming that the arrival of the professional sportsman and the loss of control by the planter aristocracy led "Kenner and the other Metairie Association members... to consider alternative uses for the track. Disagreements among the members of the association and the board of directors over the track management led the board in 1872 to close the track – a surprising decision. Ever the businessman with a keen sense of opportunity, Kenner realized that the demise of the once-majestic race course offered him and his colleagues in the Metairie Association a chance for a prosperous business venture." Craig A. Bauer, *A Leader among Peers: The Life and Times of Duncan Farrar Kenner* (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1993), 271-272. While Duncan Kenner was on the board of the Metairie Cemetery Association, Bauer gives Kenner and the Metairie Jockey Club too much credit.

The Louisiana Jockey Club used the rhetoric of democratic idealism, but the members still remained cognizant of their own high social status and retained many of the trappings of elite social organizations. Meanwhile, they lowered the price of grandstand and infield admission. The new club modified the racial segregation of the Metairie Jockey Club by allowing blacks in the public grandstand, though it still barred them from the quarter stretch.⁴⁶ Large public support for racing allowed the track to weather the Panic of 1873 with the Louisiana Jockey Club netting \$9,000 in profit from the 1875 spring meet alone.⁴⁷ As with the struggles of the Metairie Jockey Club, any prosperity was merely illusory since the club grappled with massive debt incurred from the purchase and later renovation of the Fair Grounds. Seeing their only recourse as a massive reduction in purse size, which would diminish the quality of racing, the members of the Louisiana Jockey Club, out of a professed respect for the ideals of the sport, opted to disband instead, which they did following the 1878 spring meet.

Despite the interruption in commerce that followed the Civil War and the Panic of 1873, by the late 1870s and 1880s, the economy of New Orleans began to show signs of massive revitalization. Most important to this revitalization was the reunification of Northern and Southern business interests and the connections developed between them through the world of the turf. The devastation of the Southern turf in the immediate aftermath of the war, combined with the seizure of Southern horses and the continuation of Northern racing throughout the war, shifted the balance of power in the sport north of the Mason-Dixon line. William J. Minor visited Jerome Park in New York, then under construction, and announced that he “trusted that the

⁴⁶ Somers, *Rise of Sports*, 97.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 99.

completion of the Park would inaugurate a brighter era of the Turf.”⁴⁸ The *Spirit of the Times* argued for the role of the turf “as a Means of Restoring cordial Relations,” adding that “neither legislative enactments, nor the operations of commerce, nor the dealings of finance, are, in our opinion, as effective towards the restoration of real, frank, cordial, good feeling as the gathering together of many able and influential men from most of the States at the great race meetings.”⁴⁹

The rise and subsequent decline of black liberties after the Civil War were facilitated by the reconciliation of Northern and Southern turfmen as the “racing men of the 1870s created in miniature at the track the political and economic structures they favored, and they strengthened the bonds of camaraderie and common interest that could give their models formative power on a national scale.”⁵⁰

These new men who controlled the turf were not from the antebellum southern aristocracy, but were industrialists, merchants, railroadmen, and other barons of industry – men who viewed the Jockey Clubs and the world of the turf as a necessary aspect of elite social life. As argued by Nicola Beisel, “the aim of the capitalist was not to accumulate as much capital as possible, but to establish a family embraced by the socially elect.”⁵¹ When the Jockey Club of New York was established, its chairman, August Belmont Jr., governed the association with the attitude that “racing is for the rich,” ignoring the fact that the sport depended upon the track-

⁴⁸ Typescript of Minor’s obituary in *Turf, Field, and Farm*, October 22, 1869, Box 2, Folder 43, William J. Minor Horse Racing Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT, 265.

⁴⁹ “The Turf as a Means of Restoring Cordial Relations,” *Spirit of the Times*, June 13, 1868, 210.

⁵⁰ Mooney, 159.

⁵¹ Nicola Biesel, *Imperiled Innocents: Anthony Comstock and Family Reproduction in Victorian America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 6.

going public for its continued success.⁵² Matt J. Winn of the American Turf Association would characterize the membership of the Jockey Club as “made up of blue-bloods, most of them enormously wealthy with racing as their hobby, and many of them owned huge stables of thoroughbreds.”⁵³ Since the elite status of racing was upheld, it was viewed as a vehicle for middle-class men who hoped to gain social mobility and for the elite industrialists who wanted to establish greater connections. The sport still retained the image of the racing man as that of “the genial, high-styled, fun-loving planter,” and the men who attached themselves to the sport either “clung to the traditions of their own upper-class ancestors” or created an image of themselves as “planters of the old school,” like so “many [of them] with more questionable pedigrees.”⁵⁴ The powerful belief in a strong hereditary thoroughbred bloodline led to a considerable increase in stud fees as these industrialists attempted to purchase success at the track.⁵⁵ The entrance of these men into the sport reinforced the rich and elite nature of the turf.

As industrial control over politics grew, the Northern businessmen and white Southerners reconciled, placing their joint economic concerns over the racial concerns of the nation. August Belmont, serving as the chairman of the Democratic National Committee in 1871, used his connections at the race track to facilitate the creation of a new Democratic union. Recognizing Delaware Senator Thomas Bayard, Jr., as the potential presidential candidate to lead this united

⁵² Charles Parmer, *For Gold and Glory: The Story of Thoroughbred Racing in America* (New York: Carrick & Evans, 1939), 140.

⁵³ Matt J. Winn, *Down the Stretch: The Story of Colonel Matt J. Winn* (New York: Smith & Durrell, 1945), 60.

⁵⁴ Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 68.

⁵⁵ The stud fees have only increased as time passed. The highest in recent years has been Storm Cat, a horse that at the peak of his stud career, charged \$500,000 per successful cover (breeding). Dave McKenna, “The Stud Who Fucked Himself to Death,” Deadspin, <http://deadspin.com/the-stud-who-fucked-himself-to-death-1712333565>.

Democratic party, Belmont hoped that Bayard's nomination would bring together a coalition of white Southerners who opposed Reconstruction, rich Northern industrialists who opposed government interference, and the immigrants who formed the heart of Democratic city machine politics.⁵⁶ Belmont's association with Bayard came from their shared track experiences; Bayard had served as a race judge at Saratoga in 1871, with the assistance of Louisianans Duncan F. Kenner and Paul O. Hebert.⁵⁷ United in their belief that the excesses of freedom needed to be contained, Northern and Southern turfmen asserted the necessity of order and hierarchy in accomplishing that end and establishing white unity. William Minor endorsed this belief when he defended the competitiveness of Louisiana sugar, despite the use of free labor, saying that "if we could get rid of Northern interference with the freedmen, I think we could arrange matters so as to obtain at least one half as much labor as we did before... if we can get a proportionate income and price, we may do, in a pecuniary sense, as well as ever. But the satisfaction of planting on a well regulated plantation is gone."⁵⁸ The implementation of Jim Crow laws was a way to legislate racial order. Historian Leon Litwack argues that Jim Crow was a "response to fears of a new generation of blacks unschooled in racial etiquette and to growing doubts that this generation could be trusted to stay in its place without legal force."⁵⁹ These beliefs relied on the dissemination and acceptance of Lost Cause mythology in order to implement more narrowly defined racial hierarchies.

⁵⁶ Mooney, 161-162.

⁵⁷ "'Larkin' Again in Harness," *Spirit of the Times*, March 4, 1871. Quoted in Mooney, 161.

⁵⁸ William J. Minor to Stephen Duncan, September 16, 1865, Stephen Duncan Correspondence, Box 1, Folder 1a, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, LA (hereafter cited as Duncan Correspondence).

⁵⁹ Leon Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Knopf, 1999), 230.

Part of the regional reconciliation was the development of the Lost Cause mythology that allowed Southerners to idolize the Confederate ideals and the myth of fidelity and bonds between former masters and slaves. Lost Cause supporters eagerly recounted the story of Robert E. Lee's horse, Traveller, after Lee's death in 1870. When Lee's daughter told a black stable boy to take the horse out for exercise, the horse refused to let the boy near it, despite having been docile for Lee. It was only when a white Texas collegiate mounted Traveller that the horse calmed down and became compliant.⁶⁰ The truth of the story is unimportant, since Traveller would have likely had black horsemen around him his whole life. But just as John Gilmer Speed claimed that an unruly horse would calm at the touch of its master's hand, this story revealed that even the horses of Confederate heroes knew who was allowed to master them. Like Abe's return to his former master, the most important part of Traveller's story was the message. Robert E. Lee was not alone in the pantheon of Lost Cause symbols. In death, even his horse was reunited with him as a symbol of racial hierarchy.

Despite the previous failures of the Metairie and Louisiana Jockey Clubs, public desire for racing persisted unabated. Jockey Clubs, however, could not long survive as independent franchises if they continued to operate under the same traditions as the Metairie and Louisiana Jockey Clubs. A successful jockey club needed not only something special to differentiate it from the other race courses, but also an even higher profit margin to ensure that purses remained large and the leading stables participated. The New Louisiana Jockey Club formed in 1879, funded by civic leaders like Robert Simmons and G. W. Nott, attempted to capture that special spark. There was a reciprocal relationship between the facility renovation and technological innovation the club adopted and the profit from their commercial efforts. The entrepreneurs of

⁶⁰ Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 133-135.

the New Louisiana Jockey Club "required superior stadium facilities in order to increase the sale of viewing privileges and thereby maximize return from their investment in professional sport, while the resultant outlay on building and rise in fixed costs - maintenance, capital depreciation, and ground rental - demanded that additional revenue be received from spectators."⁶¹ The club believed the recognition of this relationship was the solution to the problems that plagued previous post-war clubs. Taking a chance on this belief, club members spent all of their resources on a single spring meet. That meet proved so successful that the turfmen of the New Louisiana Jockey Club were able to purchase the Fair Grounds outright after their third season. While this initial success reflects more on the public demand for racing, the consequent changes initiated by the New Louisiana Jockey Club were instrumental in allowing them to implement ideals of modernization, professionalization, and order in the sport.

Technological changes and urbanization were major components of the modernization of horse racing in the late nineteenth century. Historian John Rickards Betts argues, "urbanization brought forth the need for commercialized spectator sports, while industrialization gradually provided the standard of living and leisure time so vital to the support of all forms of recreation."⁶² The New Louisiana Jockey Club charted the course of New Orleans horse racing during an era of great technological innovation, consistently implementing new technology to improve the tracks and amenities. The introduction of a new style of electronic starting gates ensured a fair start to the races and helped defend against accusations of cheating. When planning commenced for the 1884 World's Fair in New Orleans, the club hoped to earn

⁶¹ Peter R. Shergold, "The Growth of American Spectator Sport: A Technological Perspective," in *Sport in History: The Making of Modern Sporting History*, Richard Cashman and Michael McKernan, eds., (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1979), 22.

⁶² John Rickards Betts, "The Technological Revolution and the Rise of Sport, 1850-1900," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 40, no. 2 (September 1953): 232.

sponsorship for any racing needs because of the “large area, spacious buildings, and ... a steam engine” at the Fair Grounds.⁶³ The success of the tracks among all classes of people generally derived from their locations near streetcar and rail lines and their influence on those companies to expand transportation networks.⁶⁴ The New Louisiana Jockey Club struck a deal with the street railroad companies in 1882 “to extend their lines into the Fair Grounds for the convenience of visitors.”⁶⁵ The Fair Grounds track grew so popular that by 1904 the Street Railway Company carried as many as 10,000 visitors daily there, building “provisional tracks and runs of cars straight to the gates to induce people to go there.”⁶⁶ The installation of electric lights in 1881 for night races and normalization of Sunday racing “for those who cannot attend during the work week” were some of the commercial efforts that showed the changing nature of the horse race.⁶⁷

The greatest transformation, though, both to the turf in general and New Orleans specifically, was the proposal by Northern racing promoter, W.A. Engeman, that instead of a single spring meet, the club should focus on a long winter racing season when the cold weather had closed the prominent tracks of the North. The resulting adoption of the regular winter racing

⁶³ “Sporting News, The Turf- Some Talk about Jockey Club Affairs,” *Times-Picayune*, November 27, 1882.

⁶⁴ See Annie Johnson, “Going to the Races? Good Luck Finding a Seat on the New Orleans and Carrollton Railroad.” *Antebellum Turf Times*, August 26, 2011. <http://www.antebellumturfimes.com/2011/08/going-to-the-races-good-luck-finding-a-seat-on-the-new-orleans-and-carrollton-railroad/>. Also, the Street Railway Company was transporting up to 10,000 people daily to the Fair Grounds in 1904. “New Racing Interest in the Crescent City,” *Morning Herald* (Lexington, KY), January 31, 1904.

⁶⁵ “Sporting News, The Turf- Some Talk about Jockey Club Affairs,” *Times-Picayune*, November 27, 1882.

⁶⁶ “New Racing Interest in the Crescent City,” *Morning Herald* (Lexington, KY), January 31, 1904.

⁶⁷ The electric light technology was still emerging at this time. The night races were only held a few times before being cancelled because the bright lights made it difficult for the track judge to differentiate between the different colored uniforms worn by the jockeys.

meet, beginning on January 27, 1883, led to the change in the character of Southern racing, signifying not just the continuation of national integration of the city's tracks but, more importantly, the distinctive niche that differentiated the race tracks of New Orleans from the other major tracks in the United States. The classic Southern racing style of competitions of endurance gave way entirely to Northern racing ideals characterized by a single sprint concentrating only on speed. Historian Gunther Barth argues that industrialization and specialization also supported the shift to speed over heat races, as "watching heats came to bore people chafing at the monotony of daily routines."⁶⁸ Jockey Clubs of the city appealed to the national turf scene, hoping to attract more prominent stables through the adoption of the Northern standard of racing. The general adoption of Sunday racing, acceptable in New Orleans, but not the Puritanical northern states, because of the city's Catholic heritage, also distinguished the city among the national tracks. Institutionalizing Sunday races allowed numerous laborers to participate in the world of the turf. It was one more manner in which horse racing attempted to democratize, moving from an elite pastime to a mass leisure activity.

The adoption of Sunday races and the winter racing season solved the first problem of how to differentiate the New Orleans tracks from the other tracks of the United States. The further implementation of the national standard of rules was expected to attract the leading northern stables and bolster the prominence of the New Orleans tracks. But the Fair Grounds "could not consistently attract the country's leading thoroughbreds, because many owners preferred to rest their animals during the winter."⁶⁹ Hoping that increased purse sizes would entice those stables to race in the city, the New Louisiana Jockey Club leased out the Fair

⁶⁸ Gunther Barth, *City People: The Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 156.

⁶⁹ Somers, *Rise of Sports*, 104.

Grounds to a group of professional gambling pool sellers during the 1885 winter season, taking a large cut from their profits to fund the prizes. Attendance began to flag during that season, but Leon Lamothe and Ira E. Bride, the two most important of the professional gamblers, were able to enhance the gambling profits to offset the loss of admission fees. The amount of money that gambling raised led to an announcement that on certain race days “in keeping with Mr. Lamothe’s liberal spirit... every person will be admitted free of charge.”⁷⁰

The professional gamblers also brought with them a new more scientific and democratic form of betting – the pari-mutuel system. The pari-mutuel, also known as the “French Mutual system” or the “Paris Mutual system,” was part of a gambling shift toward scientific rationality, relying on a machine that quickly calculated and displayed the bets on a tote board, or totalizer. Pari-mutuel differed from fixed-odds gambling because in fixed-odds gambling, the individual bets against the odds given by the bookmaker or other individual. The odds given at the time of the bet are unchanging; therefore the bettor immediately knows how much he stands to win should his bet pay out. In order to ensure a profit, the bookmaker often marks up the book, so that the sum of all possible probabilities is greater than 100 percent. The odds will vary greatly between bookmakers as they are reliant on their research and beliefs, not the “true” odds, as shown by public betting. The pari-mutuel system tries to determine the true odds for the horses, thus the odds and payout constantly fluctuate based on the number of bets up until post time, with the machine’s calculating live betting and changing the displayed odds. All the money wagered on one race goes into a pot. After a small amount is taken out for state taxes, and some more for the racing association, the rest of the money wagered on the losing horses is then

⁷⁰ (New Orleans) *Weekly Pelican*, January 8, 1887. This policy of free admission only occurred on certain days. They still charged admission on most days.

distributed to the winning bettors, including repayment of their original bets.⁷¹ The main difference between fixed-odds betting and pari-mutuel betting is the determination of odds and payout. Pari-mutuel gambling takes into account the public bets so that the gambler is in effect betting against the other gamblers, while in fixed-odds gambling, the gambler is betting against the house and the bookmaker. The pari-mutuel system can be seen as a more democratic one, as it removed the possibly crooked bookmaker from the scenario, who sets betting lines in search of his own profit, and allows the people to wager among themselves, with the track and/or state charging a small percentage commission for the facilitation of bets. With more money, the Jockey Clubs raised the purse amounts, enticing a better breed of horse. New gambling houses sprang up around the city, catering to upscale elites and high-stakes gamblers, as well as the two-bit bettors and bookies.

Lamothe's impact was short-lived, though. Once the New Louisiana Jockey Club realized the sheer amount of money that Lamothe personally earned after the club took a cut and Lamothe distributed the rest of the profits among the other pool sellers, the club ended his lease early and regained full control of the track, including pool selling. The professional nature of Lamothe's gambling enterprise was integral to the success of the track, however. Once the professional gamblers left, the club depleted its funds with four straight seasons in the red. Dissatisfied with their investment, the New Louisiana Jockey Club permanently ceded control of the track to the professional gamblers and promoters, now organized under the Crescent City Jockey Club. Lamothe and other "enterprising local sporting men" organized the Crescent City Jockey Club in December 1892, which differed from the others in that it was comprised of mostly professional horsemen and gamblers, a far cry from the old elite of the city. Bookmaking became the primary

⁷¹ For an example of how pari-mutuel betting affected race track odds on a sample race, see Appendix: Pari-Mutuel Gambling.

form of gambling when the Crescent City Jockey Club gave bookmakers the monopoly on betting and also gave Western Union the exclusive right to transmit race results to other cities, concurrently protecting their own gate receipts by ensuring that Western Union would not transmit the race results to local poolrooms.⁷² Gambling was no longer a private matter between people like in the antebellum days, but was now wholly sanctioned by the tracks and institutionalized in the sport. The mimicry of those antebellum turfmen by the gamblers though “posed a problem of class reproduction” as “wealthy gamblers, like political bosses, supplanted the upper class.”⁷³

The formation of the Crescent City Jockey Club and the policies of that club represented the final stage in the process and evolution in New Orleans racing from Adelman’s premodern sporting ideal to the modern sporting ideal.⁷⁴ The general “search for order” on the race track had its foundations in tactics of crowd control. With the increased fixed costs of new facilities and technology, the clubs could little afford the property damage caused by an unruly audience. Segregation, not just by race and class, but also in excluding the disreputable turfman, was one method of minimizing tension at the track. Licensing structures were necessary to enforce the exclusion. Besides using licensing to keep out corrupt gamblers and turfmen, the clubs used

⁷² This is very similar to the blackout policies that prohibit broadcasting sporting events in a local media market to encourage attendance at the games.

⁷³ Biesel, 108–109.

⁷⁴ It was the final stage in a sense. With many variations in organization, rule structure, role differentiation, and competition, the establishment of a concrete definition of what makes one group more organized than another is a matter of perspective. In this case, while the adoption of national racing principles by New Orleans tracks had been previously done, the formation of the Jockey Club in 1894 as the national body, legitimized in hindsight by its longevity as the sport’s leading authority, was what made this the final stage in national organization.

licensing to enforce a strict standard of honesty among the starters, judges, and bookmakers.⁷⁵ Any licensing measures, though, require a superior organizing body to enforce the rules nationally. As such, the Crescent City Jockey Club standardized its rules to conform to that of *the Jockey Club*, formed in 1894 in New York as the national governing body. The powers claimed by the Jockey Club included registering every thoroughbred in racing, creating and revising racing rules, establishing racing dates at the tracks, appointing racing officials, licensing trainers and jockeys, and protecting the “honor” of the sport.⁷⁶ The Jockey Club solidified their power by purchasing the original volumes of the *American Stud Book*, establishing complete control of the Thoroughbred registry. By defining a thoroughbred as a horse that can trace its lineage back eight consecutive thoroughbred generations as recorded in the stud book, the Jockey Club ensured that it would be the sole authority, bringing control and order to the sport.⁷⁷ With solidified national, regional, and local structures in the sport, as well as a uniform standard of rules, horse racing finalized its processes of modernization.

The shifting nature of the jockey clubs from the antebellum years through the Gilded Age reflects the changes in Southern society. Historian Edward Ayers notes “the men who steered the South into ‘progress’ tended to have little use for old-fashioned honor.”⁷⁸ As the professional horsemen and gamblers ingrained themselves in the later jockey clubs, supplanting the planter aristocracy and removing the concept of honor from the sport, lamentations became prevalent

⁷⁵ Wray Vamplew, “The Sport of Kings and Commoners: the Commercialization of British Horse-Racing in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Sport in History: The Making of Modern Sporting History*, Richard Cashman and Michael McKernan, eds., (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1979), 316.

⁷⁶ Parmer, 139.

⁷⁷ Maryjean Wall, *How Kentucky Became Southern: A Tale of Outlaws, Horse Thieves, Gamblers, and Breeders* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2010), 192.

⁷⁸ Edward Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th-Century American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 273.

throughout the late-nineteenth century about the “decline” of the Southern turf. An editorial in the *Macon Telegraph* mourned that “the famous Metairie is now a graveyard; the great racing events are all crowded in the East and West.”⁷⁹ This was not a criticism of the actual practical decline, as the tracks remained generally profitable. Even during the lean years when the tracks lost money, the races still served an economic function for the city. The *Times-Picayune* noted in 1866, for example, that “every branch of trade is helped by the attractions of a well conducted race course.”⁸⁰ But Southerners decried the insidious influence of money as corrupting the honor associated with the proud antebellum “sport of kings.”⁸¹ Georgia’s Governor John B. Gordon believed that the New South might prosper if only it retained “the best of the old values, particularly honesty in politics and a sense of moral worth above ‘mere wealth’.”⁸² The changing nature of the sportsman from the amateur planter elite to the professional horseman and gambler demonstrates the realization of the fears of many in the New South.

The change in class dynamic among the clubs brought about not only this fear of corruption, but an increase in scandal also. As the jockey clubs shifted control of the sport from the old aristocracy to the gamblers and promoters, racing began to lose some of its integrity. The concept of conspicuous consumption, described by Thorstein Veblen, made it difficult to

⁷⁹ “The Last American Derby,” *Macon Telegraph*, May 30, 1886.

⁸⁰ *Times-Picayune*, December 18, 1866.

⁸¹ As argued by Anne Loveland in *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order*, it was not the possession or any proper appropriation of money that was wrong, but the *love* of money that was the root of all evil. The antebellum planter aristocracy’s ideals of racing and gambling were perfectly compatible with evangelical notions and the men could win or lose large amounts of money, so long as they remained indifferent to the financial aspect and the racing and gambling was solely for the sake of honor.; Anne Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 105.

⁸² Gaines Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987 [1985]), 83.

distinguish between the wealthy capitalists and sharpers who came together in these clubs.⁸³ The increased stakes of the culture of chance led to numerous gamblers and bookmakers trying to influence their odds through underhanded tactics. The New Orleans turf was no longer that of Duncan Kenner who ensured that races were run “under the strictest rules, and the youngest negro rider... would have scorned to take unfair advantage in riding a race.”⁸⁴ In the 1880s, the *New Orleans Times* argued that “it is... all important that the control of the New Orleans turf be kept, as it is now, in the hands of gentlemen who will tolerate nothing bearing the shadow of resemblance to trickery.”⁸⁵ It was not uncommon at the time for jockeys to own horses as well as ride them. In addition, some of the bookmakers also owned large stables of horses which they also raced. In one case, when a jockey had lost on a heavily favored horse which he owned, he had to furnish proof that he actually tried his hardest to win. He successfully defended his effort by citing a \$1,000 bet on his own horse.⁸⁶ The hiring of New Orleans stable owner Frank James, brother of Jesse, as the betting commissioner in the 1900s did little to change public opinion over the fixed nature of horse racing. By the mid-1900s, the New Orleans public was dissatisfied with the continual club promises to clean up the sport. Public “hostility toward the unreality of speculative wealth and suspicion of the speculator’s (or gambler’s) ‘castles in the air,’” developed into a corrective to the culture of chance – a corrective identified by historian Jackson

⁸³ Though it would not be a stretch to consider the robber barons, speculators, and gamblers as cut from the same cloth. Chapter Three includes the testimony of several reformers and moralizers who considered speculation to be the same as gambling.

⁸⁴ “Recollections,” Brent Papers, 13.

⁸⁵ *New Orleans Times*, January 4, 1880. Quoted in Somers, *Rise of Sports*, 109.

⁸⁶ Hennessey, 32.

Lears as the “culture of control.”⁸⁷ This corrective arose from a desire for real reform and prompted the intrusion of moral reformers and the Louisiana state government to determine control of the future of New Orleans racing.

Although economic historians John Legler and Richard Sylla conclude that New Orleans was “not well integrated” with national markets in the period from the end of the Civil War to the turn of the twentieth-century, this analysis is unsubstantiated when it comes to the national market of sports.⁸⁸ The attempts by the planter aristocracy to restore the standing of the New Orleans tracks allowed the new class of professional sportsmen to gain status. They brought in outside capital and improved the New Orleans tracks by acceding to national standards. As more money began flowing into the tracks, the lucrateness enticed many more professional sportsmen and gamblers to New Orleans. Their democratic ideals about horse racing differed vastly from the antebellum character of the sport as an extension of elite Southern honor. But it was these democratizing influences that brought in more spectators and profits. One columnist for the *Times-Picayune* lamented the distant past, saying that “in those days horse-racing was really ‘the sport of kings’, and not a means of acquiring money.”⁸⁹ The professionalization of the horse racing in New Orleans as it evolved from 1865 to the 1900s reveals the New Southern character and shows how New Orleans was able to integrate into the growing nation by carving out its own unique niche. The jockey clubs of the planter elite had backed the wrong horse, and lost their influence on the track to the new class of professional turfmen.

⁸⁷ Lears, 150.

⁸⁸ John B. Legler and Richard Sylla, “Integration of U.S. Capital Markets: Southern Stock Markets and the Case of New Orleans, 1871-1913,” in *Finance, Intermediaries, and Economic Development*, ed. Stanley L. Engerman, Philip T. Hoffman, Jean-Laurent Rosenthal, and Kenneth L. Sokoloff (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 153.

⁸⁹ “Easter Style Show Not New Thing Here,” *Times-Picayune*, April 4, 1920.

**CHAPTER THREE:
A BETTER BREED OF MEN:
MORAL REFORMERS, STATE POLITICS, AND THE DEBATE OVER THE
CONTROL OF HORSE RACING IN LOUISIANA**

The growing significance of thoroughbred horse racing to all levels of American society turned the sport into a political game. With the chance to gain power, social status, and money, conflicts arose over who would create the rules, who would get the gold, and who would take the glory. Seizing upon perceived instances of fraud and manipulation, the expanding moral reform forces, decrying the professional gamblers, urban depravity, and the “mammonism and worldliness” that corrupted both the state and its youth, turned the turf into a battleground.¹ Louisiana Lieutenant Governor Jared Y. Sanders articulated these concerns in 1907, saying “there can be no doubt that racing as presently carried on in this community is demoralizing in its tendencies, subversive of good morals and especially dangerous in its effects upon the youth of the city and State,” but added the caveat that “under proper control and regulations... racing may continue to be one of the attractions of New Orleans.”² Two powerful external influences – Protestant moral reformers and the Louisiana state government – as well as the internal influence of the Jockey Club sought to gain that control and determine the destiny of the New Orleans turf. As was the case with the vices of prostitution and liquor, reform was practically guaranteed, but the nature of reform remained in doubt as the forces of regulation matched up against the forces of prohibition.

The commercialized nature of horse racing as it flourished in the late-nineteenth century created interdependence between the tracks and bookmakers. The unbridled growth in the

¹ Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980), 87.

² “A Good Sign,” *The Caucasian* (Shreveport, LA), December 10, 1907.

number of race tracks fostered competition between them, leading to increased purse sizes to attract more competitors. The tracks then relied partially on admissions fees, but mostly bookmakers, to provide the money to afford these purses. The bookmakers also relied on the tracks to attract high quality competition which would then attract the gambling public. The success of the tracks also relied on the active roles taken by civic leaders, politicians, and the New Orleans machine in promoting professional sport. With some of these civic leaders at the helm of the sport, race track gambling kicked back a certain amount of money to its governmental benefactors and sponsors. Many of the gaming dens and professional gambling areas were not licensed, but were “permitted to exist by paying a *bonus* to the Democratic city administration, which goes to some charitable(?) fund.”³ Their system was not as well-organized as the Louisiana Lottery Company, but the public perception of governmental complicity in allowing unregulated gambling still eroded trust in the government to ever curb such a scheme. No longer was the New Orleans political culture “linked to its farmers as the embodiment of public virtues” as it had been in the days when a planter aristocracy ruled.⁴ The corruption at the heart of New Orleans politics is exemplified through the supervision of gaming in the decades after the Civil War.

Journalist Herbert Asbury described the control of gaming in New Orleans as “toleration under corrupt administrations, and suppression when reform elements were in power.”⁵ The

³ “Municipal Affairs,” *Weekly Louisianian* (New Orleans, LA), February 4, 1882.

⁴ Gunther Barth, *City People: The Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 22.

⁵ Herbert Asbury, *Suckers Progress: An Informal History of Gambling in America* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2003 [1938]), 418.; Asbury is known for being loose with the facts in many of his stories, but the Shakespeare Plan does have cited sources.

gambling situation in nineteenth century New Orleans was untenable. After the legalization of gambling in 1869, St. Charles Avenue alone, between City Hall and Canal Street, boasted forty gaming houses open, often running night and day, seven days a week.⁶ Too much competition was not ideal for the larger houses, and many gambling dens used dishonest tactics to bolster their profit margin. This dishonesty and corruption would lead to regulation. The election of Mayor Joseph Shakespeare in 1880 brought the promise of reform. In 1881, Shakespeare ordered the closure of all but sixteen gambling houses and organized a system wherein each operator could stay open without heavy competition or paying police blackmail. To remain open, the houses were required to run honest games, keep minors from playing, and contribute \$150 per month into a private fund.⁷ This system – called the Shakespeare Plan – lasted for nearly six years, raising \$30,000 annually to support the Shakespeare Almshouse in the city. After Shakespeare was voted out in favor of J. Valsin Guillotte in 1885, Guillotte diverted those contributions to a contingency fund for city officials. The system failed when the gambling houses refused to continue making contributions to what was now the city slush fund. The cycle of toleration and suppression lasted into the twentieth century, with preferential treatment going to those who paid to play. The palm-greasing that united politics and gaming was repugnant to many reformers who believed that the “Democratic rule in this city is a bane to the community.”⁸ This history of “reform” was one reason why moral reformers like Rev. Beverly Warner preached that “a decent administration of government is impossible without decent men in office

⁶ Ibid., 415.

⁷ Ibid., 417.

⁸ “Municipal Affairs,” *Weekly Louisianian* (New Orleans, LA), February 4, 1882.

and a decent electorate to whom they feel themselves to be answerable.”⁹ It was argued that state action was necessary for change since the city and the New Orleans political machine could not be relied upon to police itself.

The complete surrender to the culture of chance in New Orleans, as evidenced by the New Louisiana Jockey Club’s dependence on Leon Lamothe’s gambling pool for profit, aroused the ire of moral redeemers who feared that “society had surrendered to amoral chance.”¹⁰ Religious leaders across the state, led by New Orleans Catholic Archbishop James Hubert Blenk and Episcopalian Rev. Beverly Warner, took up the fight against “the iniquitous ‘pony pollution’ within [Louisiana.]”¹¹ Uniting a coalition across the religious spectrum, with New Orleans religious authorities such as Rabbi Max Heller, Presbyterian minister John Christie Barr, and Methodist pastor S.H. Werlein, it was reported that “the religious sentiment of the State is a unit against the proposition” for race-track gambling.¹² Archbishop Blenk’s call for Catholics of his diocese to stop “this contemplated crime against our children, our homes, and everything else worth living and striving for” was seen as a “surprise in the ranks of this great religious body [i.e. the Catholic Church], which has heretofore remained conservative in this matter.”¹³ The religious leaders’ arguments hinged on the belief that racing and gambling created disorder in moral and

⁹ “Dr. Warner Preaches on the Moral Issue,” *Times-Picayune*, November 29, 1907.

¹⁰ Lears, 150.

¹¹ Henry C. Braud, “Burnside Notes and Leaks,” *The Donaldsonville Chief* (Donaldsonville, LA), May 27, 1922.

¹² “Insolence of the Races Gamblers,” *The Colfax Chronicle* (Colfax, LA), June 11, 1910.; Barr and Werlein would also be active in the Louisiana Anti-Saloon League.

¹³ “Archbishop Calls on Catholics to Prevent Revival of Racing,” *Tensas Gazette* (St. Joseph, LA), June 10, 1910.; “Insolence of the Races Gamblers,” *The Colfax Chronicle* (Colfax, LA), June 11, 1910.

social life. Blenk felt it “was a Catholic’s duty to compel morality as a citizen, and to use his political activities for that purpose.”¹⁴ The religious reformers contended that without the imposition of strict moral reform, any proposed regulation could not endure.¹⁵

Ministerial opposition to horse racing was the outgrowth of the culture of control and derived chiefly from horse racing’s connection to and reliance on gambling culture. Some religious reformers, though, took the notion of gambling even further, decrying the entire culture of chance. Social Gospel advocate Rev. Washington Gladden voiced his concerns over the contradictory Christian approach to amusement. In an 1873 editorial on “Protestant Monasticism,” he condemned the flawed logic in a church kicking out a man for simply playing cards while simultaneously honoring “the hoary stock-gambler who has wrung millions of dollars from his fellow-men by knavish overreaching.”¹⁶ Bishop Henry C. Vrooman linked gambling to Gilded Age growth of speculation and business, saying that “of all the varied types of gambling doubtless the most colossal is that of the great stock exchanges, and the success of every rich man’s corner is apt to be followed by the dishonesty or suicide, or both, of some of his victims.”¹⁷ Evangelical writer John Bigelow also spoke to the religious aspect, but in stark contrast to the other opinions, he called upon the state legislature to fix the issues, in the name of

¹⁴ “Great Moral Movement Planned by Archbishop,” *The Lafayette Advertiser* (Lafayette, LA), July 31, 1908.

¹⁵ Conspicuously absent from the religious reform group are Lutheran ministers, noted by a letter to the editor in the *Times-Picayune*. P.R. Heisler, letter to the editor, *Times-Picayune*, June 8, 1914.

¹⁶ *Independent* 25, January 2, 1873. Quoted in William J. Baker, *Playing with God: Religion and Modern Sport* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 72.

¹⁷ Henry C. Vrooman, “Gambling and Speculation: A Symposium,” *The Arena* 11 (Boston, MA: Arena Publishing, 1895): 414.
https://books.google.com/books?id=JpVEAQAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

preserving liberty. He cited the Louisiana lottery as a case where the state had “become so completely entangled in the meshes of lottery gamblers that the Federal government was obliged to interpose with its strong arm to restore to the crippled State its imperiled sovereignty.”¹⁸ Senator Bulow Ward Marston took these concerns to heart and drafted an anti-futures bill to “release the toiling farmers of Louisiana and of the South from the thralldom of what he termed the cotton gambler.”¹⁹ Arguing vehemently that “enough talk had been indulged in regarding the horse race to move a mountain,” he believed “the race track evil did not near reach this question in importance.”²⁰ Despite his candor, and that of the other advocates who demonstrated that they held a deep understanding of the contradictions inherent in society, their efforts to expand the fight against gambling to the economic arena were unable to gain much traction in politics or the press. The focus remained chiefly on the race tracks and the vice of gambling that accompanied the sport.

The New Orleans race tracks not only had to fight against the forces of religion, but also a press that branded them as “outlaws.” The issue of outlaw tracks was advanced by the news media, after disputes over licensing authority emerged among the national jockey clubs: the American Turf Congress, the Western Jockey Club and the Jockey Club. These intra-turf fights entangled many local jockey clubs in the upper echelon’s political fracas. The struggle began after the organization of the Western Jockey Club in 1901. Citing the lax authority of the American Turf Congress, the Western Jockey Club took drastic measures against unlicensed tracks, claiming that any jockey, owner, or official who takes any role in these unlicensed races

¹⁸ John Bigelow, “What is Gambling?” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* (February 1895): 472.

¹⁹ “Hearing in the Antifutures Bill,” *Times-Picayune*, June 5, 1908.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

would be disqualified from any official meeting of the Western Jockey Club.²¹ The first earnest attack on the ruling came in Little Rock where the local track attempted to organize their meet under the auspices of the American Turf Congress, refusing to acknowledge the jurisdiction of the Western Jockey Club. Multiple stable owners who were part of the Western Jockey Club signed an agreement to race at tracks not sanctioned by the club, most notably, the Little Rock track, leading the club to brand them as “outlaws.”²² The Memphis Jockey Club announced they would stand firm with the Western Jockey Club, disallowing the outlaw turfmen from racing at their track. But Secretary Sheridan Clark of the Crescent City Jockey Club announced to the turf press that the Crescent City Jockey Club would not uphold the “outlaw ruling” of the Western Jockey Club. Clark declared that any turfman banned by the ruling would be reinstated by his club upon application.²³ Clark’s actions here were notably that of a smaller organization trying to reclaim power lost to a national body. But it was also part of the larger public narrative on the declining morality of the turf bodies, associating the New Orleans tracks with the ideas of “outlaws” and not submitting to authority.

The constant calls for governmental reform and action prompted the Louisiana state government to investigate the issues surrounding horse racing in New Orleans and around the state. New Orleans had long held the power throughout the state, but the Progressive Era shift against the New Orleans machine reasserted the power of the state government to reign in the excesses of the Big Easy. The legislative bills of the early 1900s supported by the racing interests were ones that had the goal of stamping out perceived corruption in gambling, while reaffirming

²¹ “Sweeping Outlaw Rules Adopted,” *St. Louis Republic*, March 6, 1901. Of course, the main reason the tracks remained unlicensed was because the Western Jockey Club proclaimed that they were.

²² “Memphis Horsemen are at Sea,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 24, 1901.

²³ “Heno’s Matron Stakes,” *Turf, Field, and Farm* 70, no. 41, October 11, 1901, 986.

the well-regulated order of the New Orleans jockey clubs. The basis for this reform can be seen in the changes instituted by the Jockey Club in the 1890s. The Jockey Club, under the chairmanship of August Belmont, Jr., supported the Percy-Gray bill in New York – a bill intending to outlaw gambling on races. Belmont’s influence in the state assembly amended the bill to “authorize a specified amount of racing by limiting the sport to the ‘better’ tracks,” thus bringing New York racing entirely within the purview of the Jockey Club.²⁴ In return, the Jockey Club would pay what we know as a sin tax, giving back thousands of dollars annually to the state treasury, a tactic that also served to “[remind] state legislators of the economic value of the sport to the state.”²⁵ It was hoped that the Percy-Gray law would reestablish elite control of the sport by removing the undesirable track elements and prohibiting poolroom and turf exchange gambling. Louisiana politicians followed New York’s lead and sought to shutter the poolrooms in order to appease the reformers and induce greater track attendance.

The vice of the poolroom had exploded in popularity as telegraph technology improved. These large betting rooms, or “turf exchanges,” were “often equipped with receiving sets to keep customers and bettors posted on baseball scores and track results.”²⁶ The instantaneous reporting of horse races through the telegraph wire meant that book makers no longer were required to pay the track for the privilege of laying odds in the betting ring. Bookies could divert patrons away from the race track gates, tempting them with other diversions such as women, alcohol, and other forms of gambling. By calling these gambling rooms “turf exchanges,” it bestowed upon them a

²⁴ Maryjean Wall, *How Kentucky Became Southern: A Tale of Outlaws, Horse Thieves, Gamblers, and Breeders* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2010), 191.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ John Rickards Betts, “The Technological Revolution and the Rise of Sport, 1850-1900,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 40, no. 2 (September 1953): 240.

professional nature, linking them with organizations like the Sugar Exchange or Cotton Exchange – that is, *speculation*, not gambling. Dishonest poolroom operators devastated the image of poolrooms through various confidence games. Because the operator controlled the dissemination of information, “if bettors were backing a favorite heavily, the poolroom operator could keep on accepting bets long after he learned that the horse had lost, and give out the bad news in his own good time.”²⁷ The Crescent City Jockey Club attempted to combat this fraud – locally, at least – through an arrangement with Western Union. The deal struck in the 1890s “granted track bookmakers a betting monopoly and gave Western Union the exclusive right to dispatch results to gamblers and pool-sellers in other cities,” provided they agreed not to deliver results to local poolrooms.²⁸ This arrangement did not last, however, so the jockey clubs decided that a regulatory, legislative solution was necessary to solve the persistent nuisance of the poolroom.

In 1902, State Representative Ernest J. Reinhardt of New Orleans submitted House Bill No. 13 that aimed to suppress the poolrooms throughout the state and also limit the time for horse racing. Despite the bill, the legislative reporter for the *Times-Picayune* believed “there is no probability of any serious steps being taken to abolish or curtail the time of the winter meeting.”²⁹ The representatives of the poolroom interests opposed Reinhardt’s actions and were instead “anxious to see a license tax imposed.”³⁰ The poolroom owners thought the situation

²⁷ Henry Chafetz, *Play the Devil: A History of Gambling in the United States from 1492 to 1955* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1960), 376.

²⁸ Dale Somers, *The Rise of Sports in New Orleans, 1850-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972), 107.

²⁹ “The Senate is Not Satisfied,” *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), May 15, 1902.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

unfair, noting that the race tracks had not yet been under licensing guidelines, and the property tax paid by the track was the only revenue received by the state and city from them.³¹ After the failure of Reinhardt's bill in the House Judiciary Committee, Representative Henry D. Wilson of Tangipahoa introduced two revenue license bills, proposing a graduated license tax on all race tracks and pool rooms in the state.³² Hoping that the municipal funding they provided would reflect favorably on them as reliable business organizations, the poolroom and race track interests did not oppose the bills. The pool room bill was tabled after it made it to the Senate, but the race track license passed through the Senate and was signed into law by the governor on July 10, 1902, becoming Act No. 223 of 1902. As with Percy-Gray in New York, Louisiana racing interests believed that these steps to bring order through licensure would appease the growing calls for reform. And just like the New York racing men, New Orleans turfmen had underestimated the strength of the undercurrent of support held by urban reformers.

These early legislative attempts tried to solve some of the issues surrounding race track gambling by focusing on *where* gambling was occurring. In many ways, this style of regulation was similar to the sanction and growth of Storyville, the New Orleans red-light district that existed from 1897 until 1917. A city with an unofficial motto of "Laissez les Bon Temps Rouler" was certainly not one to ban every vice. Many New Orleans citizens pushed for regulation rather than prohibition. Like the national attraction of the city's race tracks, Storyville was also a component of the socio-economic policies to modernize New Orleans and reintegrate it into

³¹ Ibid.

³² House Bills No. 218 and No. 219, *Official Journal of the Proceedings of the House of Representatives of the State of Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: The Advocate, 1902), 212.; For tracks in cities with over 100,000 people, the tax would be \$5,000; in cities of over 50,000 people: \$1,000; cities of over 25,000 people: \$500; over 10,000 people: \$100; and under 10,000 people: \$50. "Real Fight of the Session," *Times-Picayune*, May 24, 1902.

commercial American society after Reconstruction. The growth of the concert saloon near the turn of the century blurred the line between brothel and bar. Without laws defining and regulating these types of businesses, young girls were regularly found working in these houses.³³ The *Daily Picayune* called for an end to concert saloons, but did not want to target houses of prostitution, provided they were clearly marked as such, since “it was no use going after sin itself.”³⁴ The New Orleans *Mascot* also declared that it had no issue with “houses of ill fame...as long as they are not located in respectable neighborhoods.”³⁵ Thus, the Storyville ordinance was established, which did not explicitly legalize prostitution within certain city limits, but criminalized it without those limits. While it was meant to contain the vice of prostitution by focusing on where it could occur, Storyville’s existence only confirmed the argument that New Orleans was a city of sin. The worlds of horse racing and prostitution were linked through the Blue Books of Storyville, said to be issued for the benefit of men “who want to be a thoroughbred rounder” and featuring ads like the one for the Arlington Café and Restaurant, picturing a thoroughbred race horse and the caption “The House of Sports.”³⁶ Such houses catered to the upscale elites and high-stakes gamblers, as well as two-bit bettors and bookies. The Blue Books often advertised to “sporting” men, defined by historian Emily Epstein Landau as code for “the male world of drinking, gambling, and prostitution.”³⁷ Archbishop Blenk also

³³ The Gay-Shattuck Saloon Law of 1909 did finally address the issue of saloons, though some parts of the law were seen as unconstitutional by the public. Specifically for women, provisions of the law barred the issuing of liquor licenses to women and it also forbade women, girls, or minors from serving in a barroom.

³⁴ Emily Epstein Landau, *Spectacular Wickedness: Sex, Race, and Memory in Storyville, New Orleans* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 39.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Chafetz, 203.

³⁷ Landau, 115.

related the failures of regulation in the vices of race track gambling and prostitution, asserting that “clean racing is as imposible[sic] as a clean brothel.”³⁸ If reformers believed the race-track was a site of immorality, they were even harsher on the depravity that took place in the rest of the sporting world.

The legislature finally took action against poolrooms through Act No. 128 of 1904, better known as the Hunsicker Poolroom bill. Introduced by Representative Henry Hunsicker of Caddo Parish, the bill declared the operation of poolrooms to be gambling, and therefore it should be suppressed.³⁹ After several poolroom closures and arrests, the issue came before the Louisiana Supreme Court in the case of *State v. Rabb*. After his arrest and imprisonment, defendant William Rabb appealed the original decision, arguing that the crime he was accused of was not defined in the law. Chief Justice Joseph A. Breaux’s opinion held that “gaming in poolrooms is prohibited by statute in terms not to be misunderstood,” since the wording of the statute “unmistakably denounces as illicit an act of betting in poolrooms.”⁴⁰ The Chief Justice explained the intent of the law which was focused on where the gambling occurred. He said it did not prohibit legitimate betting on horse races *at the track*, but prohibited it at the poolroom where “the racing of horses was the merest incident and gambling was the attraction (in a retired place away from the race track).”⁴¹ A similar ruling in *State v. Maloney* had Justice Alfred D. Land opine that the Hunsicker Poolroom Law “was in response to [previous] decisions of this court to

³⁸ “Archbishop Calls on Catholics to Prevent Revival of Racing,” *Tensas Gazette* (St. Joseph, LA), June 10, 1910.

³⁹ Act No. 128, *Acts Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Louisiana at the Regular Session* (Baton Rouge: Advocate, 1904), 292-293.

⁴⁰ *State v. Rabb*, 39 So. 971 (La. S. Ct. 1904).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

the effect that betting on horse races, whether on the track or remote from the track, was sanctioned by the Civil Code of the State. The act is, therefore, to be construed with reference to the particular evil pointed out and sought to be remedied.”⁴² The rulings on the Hunsicker cases set a strong precedent that would be used in later gambling cases, as Chief Justice Breaux made clear that “it is incumbent upon [the Court] to interpret statutes as written.”⁴³ These Supreme Court cases impressed upon the state legislature the importance of wording in any potential anti-gambling statute.

Legislation supported by the jockey clubs rhetorically declared that the clubs were invested in cleaning the dishonest element out of the sport. But more important, it consolidated control of the tracks and gambling in the hands of the jockey clubs, turfmen, and professional gamblers. Regulation was the route that legislators wanted to take to curb vice, but many reformers saw this as not just a centralization of immorality, but a corrupting influence on government too. Urban reformers who opposed the rule of the New Orleans Mayor Martin Behrman, the Choctaw Club, and machine politics, grew dismayed over the close connections between the New Orleans machine and gambling interests. They viewed the consolidation of turf control as increasing machine power in the state. Mounting agitation among reformers, turfmen, and the public had been increasing the pressure on the legislature to act on the track question. The biggest impetus on the legislature to respond, however, was the January 1908 election of Governor Jared Y. Sanders, Sr. Announcing in his inaugural address that “the manner and mode of conducting race tracks in and around New Orleans, and the flagrant gambling carried on at the tracks, has deservedly aroused the moral sense of the people against it,” Sanders pushed the

⁴² “Supreme Court Now Holds Courthouse Bonds Legal,” *Times-Picayune*, December 5, 1905.

⁴³ *State v. Rabb*. 39 So. 971 (La. S. Ct. 1904).

General Assembly to enact “legislation prohibiting and penalizing gambling on horse racing.”⁴⁴

Less than a month later, two competing plans for state action faced off in the legislature: one based on internal reform and regulation, the other on external reform and prohibition.

The first bill regarding race track gambling to reach the floor was the one introduced by State Representative Leon Locke of Lake Charles. The language of the bill proposed by Representative Locke was drafted with the help of the Anti-Race Track Committee of New Orleans, chaired by James Joseph McLoughlin, a New Orleans lawyer who was involved with numerous Catholic interests.⁴⁵ Other key committee members included attorney Chandler Luzenberg, Archbishop Blenk, financier Robert M. Walmsley, Rabbi Isaac L. Leucht, and reformer John M. Parker.⁴⁶ Within days of Governor Sanders’ inauguration, the Anti-Race Track Committee met with the governor to draw up legislation and then spoke with many senators and representatives to drum up support. The full-text of the final bill put forward by Locke was quite short:

An Act to prohibit gambling on horse races by the operation of betting books, French Mutuel pooling devices, auction pools or other device, and to provide penalties for the violation of the provisions thereof.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Louisiana, that any person who, either as agent, owner, officer or employee, shall in any room, hall, house, or any inclosure, or upon any track, path, road or course, whether within or without an inclosure, in this State, engage in encouraging, promoting, aiding or assisting in the operation of a betting book, or a French Mutuel pooling device, upon any kind of horse race or races, or in selling auction pools upon any horse race, which are hereby declared to be gambling, or shall by any other device encourage, promote, aid or assist any person or persons to bet or wage upon a horse race or races, run or trotted or paced, within this State or elsewhere, shall be

⁴⁴ “Governor Sanders’ Inaugural Address,” *Times-Picayune*, May 19, 1908.

⁴⁵ “McLoughlin, James Joseph,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia and Its Makers* (New York: Encyclopedia Press, 1917), 108.

⁴⁶ “Anti-Race Track Gambling Fight,” *Times-Picayune*, April 5, 1908.

guilty of a misdemeanor, and, upon conviction, shall be fined not less than one hundred dollars and imprisoned for a period of not less than six nor more than twelve months.⁴⁷

Believing all race track gambling “to be a menace to our homes and the prolific cause of embezzlement and crime,” the Anti-Race Track Committee and Senator Locke pointed to the fraud, corruption, and disreputable characters as their rationale for banning race track gambling.⁴⁸

The Locke bill prohibited all bookmaking and pari-mutuel gambling at Louisiana race tracks, effectively shutting down the New Orleans race tracks. This reform was meant to emulate the Hart-Agnew Law that had recently been passed by the New York legislature with the backing of New York Governor Charles Evans Hughes, which prohibited race track gambling in the previously untouchable New York racing stronghold. The Hart-Agnew Law forced the two-year closure of the Saratoga Race Track, one of the oldest and most prestigious in the nation.⁴⁹ Like New Orleans, Sarasota Springs catered to the elite with its fair share of casinos, hotels, and houses of prostitution. Senator Locke and the Anti-Race Track Committee desired to repeat New York’s legislative success.

In an effort to stave off disaster and bring order to the Louisiana tracks, State Senator Charles C. Cordill of Tensas Parish introduced a bill proposing a state commission to regulate and reform horse racing and gambling. The Cordill bill would control and segregate the unrestricted bookmaking interests, allowing only licensed professional gamblers to operate at the

⁴⁷ “Vote on the Locke Bill 21 to 19,” *Times-Picayune*, June 24, 1908.

⁴⁸ “Anti-Race Track Gambling Fight,” *Times-Picayune*, April 5, 1908.

⁴⁹ Carole Case, *Down the Backstretch: Racing and the American Dream* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1991), 23. Sarasota Springs is now the home of the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame, honoring achievement in thoroughbred racing.

New Orleans tracks and shutting down the smaller tracks that were thought to be the cause of the corruption. Leading the fight in support of the Cordill bill was a former Representative from Orleans, Major George H. Terriberry, now representing the interests of the City Park and Crescent City Jockey Clubs. The jockey clubs stated publicly that they would be “perfectly satisfied with a most drastic [racing] commission” or anything that would preserve the sport.⁵⁰ In Major Terriberry’s statement for both clubs, he announced that they wanted to preserve legitimate racing through regulation in order to ensure that it remained a “high-class sport.”

These regulations included:

no Sunday races, no night races; no half-mile tracks within twenty-five miles of cities of over 50,000 inhabitants; no owner of a race horse participating in racing can be a stockbroker in the Club that is directing the meeting; no owner shall be a bookmaker or have any interests in a book; no minors shall be admitted to the track unless accompanied by their parents or legitimate guardians; no racing association would be permitted to carry on racing without having the permit of the State Commission; the Commission shall be the judge of how many days shall be allotted to any Club and no ground for a race track could be broken without the permit and sanction of the State Commission.⁵¹

Despite the call for regulation, the jockey clubs still hoped to preserve their influence on the sport. Metropolitan New Orleans had two main race tracks: City Park and the New Orleans Fair Grounds, managed by the City Park Jockey Club and Crescent City Jockey Club, respectively. They faced some minor competition from a few smaller half-mile tracks, not sanctioned by any of the local or national Jockey Clubs, which were believed to attract the more disreputable bookmakers and horsemen. These tracks could be found in Jefferson Parish and in St. Bernard Parish, both just outside New Orleans. Jefferson Parish has had a long tradition of open, illegal gambling, tacitly tolerated by the sheriff, the local law enforcement official in the early 1900s.

⁵⁰ “Lines Being Drawn for Big Contests,” *Times-Picayune*, May 27, 1908.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Gambling thrived in Jefferson Parish under Sheriff Louis (Leo) H. Marrero in what was often called the “Free State of Jefferson.”⁵² As New Orleans was the only city in Louisiana with over 50,000 people at that time, the proposed bill meant that City Park and the New Orleans Fair Grounds tracks would be the only ones allowed to run.⁵³ With no other tracks in the city longer than a half-mile, and with a permit and sanction required to even break ground, both jockey clubs would have even more control over New Orleans racing. The debate over which competing vision of the sport would prevail grew extremely heated during the summer of 1908.

The supporters of racing focused on two main rhetorical strategies in their defense of racing. First, they defended the sport as promoting the development of thoroughbred horses. Representative William T. Cunningham of Natchitoches argued that “to do away with the races meant the doing away with the fine horse.”⁵⁴ He echoed Matt Winn’s sentiment regarding betting in that “there are a lot of good people raising horses, and when you deny them the privilege of backing their judgment you deny them a means of making a living.”⁵⁵ Second, the supporters emphasized the economic aspect and the tourism it brought to New Orleans. John J. Frawley of the City Council spoke before the House of Representatives about the “good that the game does for the city.”⁵⁶ A petition from a group of hotel men against the bill reasoned that “they had

⁵² Louis Vyhnanek, *Unorganized Crime: New Orleans in the 1920s* (Lafayette, LA: Center for Louisiana Studies, 1998), 114. This is while Marrero is also stating that “there will be no failure on the part of Jefferson Parish authorities to enforce the law.” “Opening of Suburban Meeting To-Day Not Worrying Antis,” *Times-Picayune*, January 16, 1909.

⁵³ United States Census, “Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places: 1910,” <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab14.txt>.

⁵⁴ “The Antiracing Bill Passed by the House,” *Times-Picayune*, June 11, 1908.

⁵⁵ “The Race Track Issue up to the Legislature,” *Times-Picayune*, June 2, 1908.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

invested millions in property” and that “their principal patronage in winter was from the racing people,” without whom some \$500,000 would be taken out of circulation during the winter season.⁵⁷ One of those men was Justin F. Denechaud of the New Denechaud Hotel, which hosted three thousand people during the racing season, twenty five percent of whom were attracted by the race track. He said that he personally was not interested in the tracks, but racing was “the strongest card New Orleans had for winter tourists. If the races are abolished I believe the hotel business as now developed would be a losing proposition.”⁵⁸ The turfmen’s solution was one of centralized management in the state racing commission to ensure honesty in the sport. Representative Charles A. Byrne of New Orleans spoke for them against the Locke bill, concluding “if racing in New Orleans is an evil, it is because it is mismanaged.”⁵⁹

The Louisiana legislators in favor of banning race-track gambling needed to look no further than the Louisiana Constitution to find a strategy to attack racing. Article XIX, Section 8 of the Constitution declared that “gambling is a vice and the Legislature shall pass laws to suppress it.”⁶⁰ The gambling opponents could not fathom any attempt at regulation as they considered it a constitutional obligation to suppress gambling. Representative Locke argued that prohibition was necessary as there was no such thing as a “‘golden medium’ between right and wrong.”⁶¹ The other pro-racing arguments were attacked from a moral standpoint. The horse

⁵⁷ “The Antiracing Bill Passed by the House,” *Times-Picayune*, June 11, 1908.

⁵⁸ “Favorable Report on the Locke Race Gambling Bill,” *Times-Picayune*, June 17, 1908.

⁵⁹ “The Antiracing Bill Passed by the House,” *Times-Picayune*, June 11, 1908.

⁶⁰ “Rack-Track Gambling,” *New Iberia Enterprise and Independent Observer* (New Iberia, LA), May 30, 1914.; It should be noted though that the sentiment remains in the state constitution to this day, as Article XII, Section 6(4.B) states “gambling shall be defined by and suppressed by the legislature.”

⁶¹ “The Race Track Issue Up To The Legislature,” *Times-Picayune*, 2 June 1908.

breeding argument came under fire from New Orleans Representative Harold A. Moise who was “opposed to any method to elevate the breed of horses that degrades the breed of men.”⁶² The economic argument was assailed as well. Attorney Chandler Luzenberg argued that it should not just be about the money, “but the business integrity of the men.... The money these race-track followers spend is not brought to New Orleans; it is taken away from our own people, many of whom cannot afford it and some of whom have stolen it.”⁶³ The arguments for the superiority of the moral economy generally referenced an earlier reform in Louisiana politics – the prohibition of the Louisiana Lottery.

The tactics and integrity of Lottery commissioner Charles T. Howard were discussed in the previous chapter; the corruption of the system and the religious opposition to the scheme are the important factors here. The Louisiana Lottery Company was the most successful of the lottery companies established after the Civil War. Howard’s deal-making ability, and political bribery, ensured that the Louisiana Lottery had all the resources and protection it needed, while kicking back a sizeable amount of taxes to the state. Known as “the Serpent” by its critics, a vast network allowed the Louisiana Lottery to be marketed nationally through the mail, telegraph, and branch offices. Over ninety percent of the lottery tickets for the Louisiana lottery were sold outside of Louisiana.⁶⁴ Not only were other states disturbed by how much money was moving from their state into Louisiana, but the Louisiana Anti-Lottery League was also concerned with the corrupting influence of the Lottery on the state. In 1890, Congress passed a law banning

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Michael Nelson and John Lyman Mason, *How the South Joined the Gambling Nation: The Politics of State Policy Innovation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 3.

lottery-related mail from being delivered and its enforcement led to the shuttering of the Lottery's Louisiana operations in early 1892. The callback to the Lottery fight during the anti-gambling debates of 1908 drew on one clear similarity – though it was “never simply a moral crusade, the Louisiana antilottery movement clearly had a religious dimension, and ministers actively participated.”⁶⁵

With spirited debate already in progress in the House of Representatives, the anti-race track faction quickly had a bill introduced in the State Senate by Senator J. Rush Wimberly of Bienville, similar to the Locke Bill, hoping to “start the fires in the Senate, as well as in the House.”⁶⁶ By June, the racetrack issue overshadowed everything else in the Legislature. Both sides had persuasive, fiery speakers who lambasted each other for hours. Attorney Chandler C. Luzenberg, of New Orleans, made the opening address for the Locke bill. He called race track gambling “the greatest curse of Louisiana” as “the money the race track gamblers spend in New Orleans is taken from the people of that city.”⁶⁷ Luzenberg saw the demoralizing influences of gambling as “it went into the homes, where the children were growing up, where it made young men gamblers.”⁶⁸ The main problem was the “dopesters,” the men advertising around town that they had the inside tips and could help bet on the “sure thing.” Even if the races were legitimate and there was no fix, the appearance of these men did nothing to dissuade the notion that the sport was rigged. The Locke bill supporters also found multiple problems with the Cordill bill's

⁶⁵ Gaines Foster, *Moral Reconstruction: Christian Lobbyists and the Federal Legislation of Morality, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 124.

⁶⁶ “Much Work Done by the Legislature,” *Times-Picayune*, May 30, 1908.

⁶⁷ “The Race Track Issue Up To The Legislature,” *Times-Picayune*, June 2, 1908.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

establishment of a state racing commission. They argued that it would be ineffectual because, while it made bookmaking illegal, it set no penalty for bookmaking. The racing interests were fighting an uphill battle, and so long as the fight was framed as one “between the men who support the law and Constitution and the race-track gambler and tout,” they would be hard-pressed to win support.

Despite these issues, the supporters of the Cordill regulatory bill astutely identified a fundamental problem with the Locke bill. When it started as the anti-race track bill brought to Governor Sanders by the Anti-Race Track Committee, it was a direct copy of a Tennessee law. The Committee made one small change to it, though; they eliminated the section of the Tennessee law that prohibited individual betting.⁶⁹ No rationale was apparent for why that provision was dropped, but given that the edit occurred during their Capital trip, it is likely that the committee’s discussions with the rural senators informed them that it was necessary to ensure rural support for the Locke bill. Racing supporter Major George Terriberly highlighted this point in the legislative debate, arguing that by permitting individual betting, the Locke bill “would not interfere with the parish fair, where everybody knows everybody else and you can place your money. But in New Orleans it wouldn’t work.”⁷⁰ He said he believed that “individual betting was eliminated from the Locke bill because it was believed necessary in order to try to carry the bill through.”⁷¹ Advocates for the Locke bill simply ignored the criticism, as Judge Saunders did when he said “the Locke Bill does not prohibit individual betting, because no person who has

⁶⁹ “Fireworks Start in the Legislature,” *Times-Picayune*, May 21, 1908.

⁷⁰ “The Race Track Issue Up to the Legislature,” *Times-Picayune*, June 2, 1908.

⁷¹ “Favorable Report on the Locke Race Gambling Bill,” *Times-Picayune*, June 17, 1908.

sense enough to stay out of the insane asylum would place an individual bet on horses.”⁷²

Luzenberg’s defense for why it permitted individual betting was merely that they “wanted to get at the root of the evil and not trouble ourselves with trivial matters.”⁷³ All of these excuses set up a system where pari-mutuel betting was unacceptable but individual betting was tolerable, as explained by Luzenberg, “it left all the good [i.e. individual betting], and merely did away with the vice of the game [i.e. bookmaking].”⁷⁴ The finest summarization of the individual betting question in the Locke bill was delivered by Senator Walter L. Gleason. He argued since Representative Locke did not think that individual betting was wrong and “the Locke bill will not suppress gambling,” that “when a bill purports to suppress a thing and misses it so far as this measure does,” it cannot be said that the subject at its heart is a “moral issue.”⁷⁵

Lawyers for the tracks interpreted both the Locke bill and the Hunsicker Poolroom bill as prohibiting bookmaking operations and the French pari-mutuel system, but not “the making and recording of bets between individuals.”⁷⁶ The “oral betting” or “individual betting” system required the bettor to write on a slip of paper the name of the horse, the order of finish, and the odds (provided orally by the bookie). The bettor then signed his name, before handing the paper and bet to the “oralizer,” the term that bookies went by once oral betting was the only method of

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ “The Race Track Issue Up To The Legislature,” *Times-Picayune*, June 2, 1908.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ “Vote on the Locke Bill 21 to 19,” *Times-Picayune*, June 24, 1908.

⁷⁶ “Racing Situation Grows Interesting,” *Times-Picayune*, August 20, 1908.

bookmaking.⁷⁷ After the race, the bettor then found the oralizer and collected his payment if he won. One important reason for the defense of individual betting was its connotation with the antebellum style of racing and the honor believed to be characteristic of the sport. Racing was considered to be a legitimate sport before the entry of the bookmaker who “became a director, by which he was able to influence judges; as owner, he could control his jockeys.”⁷⁸ The pari-mutuels, by contrast, were viewed as machine tools invented by the gamblers; their use, or “technique”, as indicated by sociologist Jacques Ellul, “never observes the distinction between moral and immoral use.... Not even the moral conversion of the technicians could make a difference.”⁷⁹ President Theodore Grunewald of the Citizens’ Sound Legislation League in New Orleans reported in 1908 that “the Locke bill don’t kill these small tracks, nor even prohibit gambling at them, for it allows individual betting. But it makes betting prohibitive at the two big city tracks because they are patronized by strangers and individual betting would therefore be quite impossible.”⁸⁰ The smaller tracks were more popular with local citizens than the New Orleans tracks, which attracted thousands of visitors since New Orleans was known as the winter home of racing. Though the religious reformers who came to the state capitol did not seem to take issue with the continuation of horse racing at the small tracks, at least one evangelist did.

Georgia evangelist Sam Jones often spoke out against the sport, claiming that “the straightest road and the quickest time that is made to hell is on the race course with a blooded

⁷⁷ Methods vary widely here. Depending on what time and which track, some of the oralizers only accepted the slips of paper and it was up to the bettor to square away with bet after the race, win or lose. This method sometimes led to either bettors or oralizers to renege on their bets, but it was not entirely common as dishonest bookies and bettors would find themselves shut out from continued gambling.

⁷⁸ “The Race Track Issue Up To The Legislature,” *Times-Picayune*, June 2, 1908.

⁷⁹ Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. by John Wilkinson (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), 97.

⁸⁰ “News and Notables at the New Orleans Hotels,” *Times-Picayune*, June 4, 1908.

horse under you.”⁸¹ He denounced the reliance of the agricultural fair on the horse track, calling it the “principal attraction” that drew a “debauched, disreputable crowd” to the fair.⁸² Historian Ted Ownby’s discussion of the growth of horse racing at the country and state fairs, calls it a “more traditional form of disreputable recreation.”⁸³ However, Ownby mischaracterizes the context for the growth of rural horse racing at the fairs. He argues that “by organizing traditional events into large spectator affairs and by creating a setting for gambling, the fairs offered new opportunities for what was widely considered disreputable conduct,” but these were not necessarily new opportunities, nor were the spectators all of the rural populace he mentioned.⁸⁴ Horse racing at the county and parish fair was generally a smaller affair throughout the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. It was a horse racing “frontier” with minimal regulation and lesser quality horses. When evangelist Sam Jones preached against the race courses at the county fair in 1912, asking “where will you find a more debauched, disreputable crowd?,” most states had already outlawed race track gambling, ending the reign of the urban commercial track that could not sustain itself without gambling.⁸⁵ The explosive growth of the race course at the country fair coincided with the prohibition of urban gambling, as the less formal nature of the fair tracks and the smaller crowds allowed for different means of gambling, very similar to the antebellum standard. This form of oral betting was characterized by bets made

⁸¹ “A Talk to Men Only: By Rev. Sam Jones at the Moundville Meeting,” *The Wheeling Daily Intelligencer* (Wheeling, WV), August 21, 1893.

⁸² Sam Jones, *Sam Jones’ Revival Sermons* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1912), 141. Quoted in Baker, *Playing with God*, 89.

⁸³ Ownby, 191.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Sam Jones, *Sam Jones’ Revival Sermons* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1912), 141. Quoted in Ownby, 191.

between two people. The smaller crowds at the fair meant that it was less likely for someone to walk out on a lost bet than it would be at the massive urban track which was patronized by numerous tourists. The New Orleans jockey clubs began to investigate this Locke oral betting loophole, in case the final vote did not go their way.

On June 10, 1908, by a vote of 87 to 20, the Locke anti-racing bill overwhelmingly passed the Louisiana House of Representatives.⁸⁶ Supporters of the Locke bill immediately announced that they had twenty-six Senators on their side, whereas only twenty-one votes were necessary to pass the bill.⁸⁷ The Senate passed the Locke anti-racing bill, 21 to 19, though not without conflict.⁸⁸ On the scheduled evening of the vote, the Locke faction realized they were two votes short when one senator became ill and the other missed his morning train from Livingston Parish. The other Locke supporters began to filibuster, awaiting the return of the two men. When they failed to arrive, the anti-racing bloc motioned to adjourn, hoping the men would attend when the Senate reconvened the next day. Two Senators were ill, yet dragged themselves from their sickbeds to vote in favor of the bill. The “dishonorable” tactics of the bill’s opponents were called out, as the racing supporters “spent an hour or more talking in hopes of tiring those Senators, believing they would be too sick to remain in their seats.”⁸⁹ The presumed skullduggery of the turfmen was alluded to yet again, as friends of Senator S. J. Smart of De

⁸⁶ One representative, Lewis Lagarde of New Orleans, was permitted to excuse himself from voting on the bill. This is notable in that Lagarde was the current Secretary of the City Park Jockey Club. It is probable that Lagarde identified the vast divide in the vote and offered himself as a symbol of the integrity of racing men in an attempt to sway the Senate vote. The Orleans delegation was divided on the Locke bill with seven for it, fourteen against it, one absent, one excused, and one not voting.

⁸⁷ “Friends of Racing Ready to Vote in New York Senate,” *The Lexington Herald*, June 11, 1908.

⁸⁸ “Vote on the Locke Bill 21 to 19,” *Times-Picayune*, June 24, 1908.

⁸⁹ “Locke Bill Now a Law,” *The Rice Belt Journal* (Welsh, LA), June 26, 1908.

Soto claimed that he had been poisoned by some type of knockout drug given to him by racing supporters.⁹⁰ One anecdotal story posits that it was thanks to one man that the Locke bill passed – Archbishop Blenk of New Orleans. The report claims that Senator Robert O’Connor of Orleans Parish was in the pocket of the New Orleans machine, and he told Archbishop Blenk that if he were to vote for the bill, it “would mean political annihilation.”⁹¹ An hour before the final vote, Archbishop Blenk called up Senator O’Connor and said only “O’Connor, you must vote for the Locke bill.” This call in some way changed the senator’s opinion, and he voted for the bill, giving it a two-vote victory instead of tying the vote at 20 apiece.⁹² Even if this is merely a news story to demonstrate Blenk’s influence as the Prohibition fight geared up, it is demonstrative of the coalitions that formed between moral reformers and government officials.⁹³ Louisiana thus was one of four states that had completely abolished racing by 1909, the others being California, Tennessee, and Arkansas. By January 1, 1911, Florida had joined the list of states banning race-

⁹⁰ “Senator Smart, A Locke Bill Supporter, Given Poison,” *Times-Picayune*, June 23, 1908. This sensationalism, reported on the day of the vote, was meant to urge public support for the bill against the “menace” of gambling. Of course, the next day Smart himself offered a statement denying that he was poisoned, stating that it was just the combination of indigestion and a large dose of ipecac. The correction came too late to reverse the public outrage. “Dramatic Scene in the Senate During the Locke Bill Fight,” *Times-Picayune*, June 24, 1908.

⁹¹ “Archbishop’s Order Killed Racing Game,” *The Spokane Press*, July 4, 1908.

⁹² This story is difficult to believe, especially given so little context for why Senator O’Connor would presumably change his mind after the phone call when numerous in-person visits changed nothing. Nonetheless, it provides an excellent example of the coalitions and interplay that existed between religious reformers and state officials.

⁹³ In addition, the Archbishop’s beliefs seem to be generally counter to the traditional stances held by the Catholic Church. As essayist William Garrott Brown argues in “The South and the Saloon,” Episcopal and Catholic clergymen rarely take an active part in the anti-temperance movement, with many actually opposing it as an “unwise and improper method of promoting temperance.” William Garrott Brown, “The South and the Saloon,” *The Century* 76, no. 3 (July 1908): 464-465. Even if Blenk was unable to convince a majority of New Orleans’ Catholics to adopt an anti-liquor and anti-gambling position, he reportedly convinced at least one person whose position mattered.

track gambling so that the only states allowing race track gambling were Maryland, Oklahoma, Montana, Kentucky, Virginia, and Utah.⁹⁴

The metaphorical thoroughbred of the New Orleans gamblers had fallen and broken its leg coming down the homestretch, but the gamblers were not ready to give up just yet. After the Locke bill was passed, but before it took effect, the New Orleans Fair Grounds inaugurated a twenty-one-day race meeting, allowing for open gambling with full races of twelve horses up until the day the track was forced to shut down.⁹⁵ The track owners had planned to run the track one day beyond when the Locke bill went into effect, so as to make a test case in the courts and receive a definition of “individual betting.” The meaning of “individual betting” was not defined in the law, and it was hoped that the test case would force the Supreme Court to define it. The track owners, though, began to fear that the Supreme Court would throw their case out of court due to issues of ripeness and justiciability as summer racing had not been a staple of the New Orleans tracks. If the case were brought to the court during the winter when racing was normally held, it was felt that the public would be more sympathetic to the tracks. The jockeys took the cancellation of the summer series especially hard. They had “dreamed... of nice fat purses and a chance to make enough money to get away to some fairer clime, where horseracing flourishes

⁹⁴ Chafetz, 383. Montana only had one track in the state (in Butte) with a 30-day racing season. Race track gambling was legal in Utah, but it was illegal in Salt Lake City. There was no winter racing season in the United States after the closure of the California, Florida, Texas, and Louisiana tracks. The New Orleans Fair Grounds was the former “home of winter racing,” but it was soon taken over by the only remaining track left in the South – south of the border in Juarez, Mexico. Matt Winn was instrumental in the creation of the Juarez track, continuing his democratic rhetoric by stating that “rich owners could afford winter vacations, but not so the man for whom racing is a profession.” Winn established a friendly relationship with Pancho Villa to ensure the security of the Juarez race track and everyone associated with it, as it flourished during the Mexican Revolution. Winn, 78.

⁹⁵ “Rush on Racing Before Locke Law,” *Times-Picayune*, June 30, 1908.

and the bookmaker waxes fat.”⁹⁶ The New Orleans Jockey Club opened up a one day meeting on December 16, 1908, at the City Park race track with “the object being simply to secure a square test in the courts of the Locke law.”⁹⁷ Samuel F. Heaslip and Edward Corrigan, another stockholder in the Jockey Club were both arrested that day, in addition to two major bookmakers and the manager of the meet.⁹⁸ They were all found guilty and paid fines, but were given clemency by the governor and spared serving prison sentences.⁹⁹

One significant effect of the Locke law can be seen in the arrests of turfmen and bookmakers in New Orleans. When Heaslip and Corrigan were arrested, the first bookmaker to be arrested with them for violating the Locke law was an Italian named Placide Frigerio. Based on the records of the Criminal District Court in Orleans Parish, many of the bookies arrested for betting violations were Italian. The nativist fears and anti-Italian sentiment among the New Orleans police force can be discerned in the disproportionate arrests of Italian men. The police discrimination can be partially derived from the murder of New Orleans Police Chief David Hennessey in 1890. Hennessey’s reputation for prosecuting Sicilian criminals led to the spread of rumors that Hennessey was assassinated by Italian Mafiosi. A hasty sweep of the city, under the direction of Mayor Shakespeare, to “arrest every Italian you come across,” ended in the arrests of

⁹⁶ “No Summer Racing at the Big Tracks Here,” *Times-Picayune*, July 1, 1908.

⁹⁷ “City Park Race Track Will Test Locke Anti-Racing Bill,” *The Lexington Herald*, December 16, 1908.

⁹⁸ “Defendants Index, (1880-1918)”, Criminal District Court (Orleans Parish), City Archives, New Orleans Public Library. <http://nutrias.org/~nopl/inv/crdcindex/crdcindex.htm>.

⁹⁹ “Merchants’ Jockey Club Formed for Winter Race Meet Here,” *Times-Picayune*, August 17, 1910.

forty-five people within the day.¹⁰⁰ The populace of New Orleans was overcome by nativist anxieties, and the jury acquittal of the men tried for the murder did nothing to assuage the public. A mob of over a thousand citizens marched on the parish prison where the defendants were being held, crying out to “hang the dago murderers,” before storming the grounds and lynching all eleven Italian prisoners.”¹⁰¹ The same sentiment can be seen on the turf at Hyland Park, one of the half-mile tracks, when Leo H. Marrero Jr., president of the New Orleans Trotting and Breeders’ Association and son of Sheriff Marrero, pulled out his gun to kill Italian gambler Tony Mendola, who was fighting a bookmaker after a dispute regarding a poor start in a race.¹⁰² Even when many of the Locke law arrests were being overturned by the courts, the New Orleans police, according to extant records, appeared to continue arresting primarily Italian bookmakers for violations.

To prevent arrest and fines, the New Orleans turfmen and professional gamblers attempted to conform to the letter of the law, but they did not give up the fight completely. The New Louisiana Jockey Club ended their association with the Fair Grounds track at the close of the 1908 season, giving a five-year lease to the Business Men’s Racing Association (BMRA).¹⁰³ To try and sustain interest, the BMRA held several large race meetings, that is, series of races, throughout the winter and spring instead of a full racing season, using gate fees to partially offset

¹⁰⁰ Barbara Botein, “The Hennessey Case: An Episode in Anti-Italian Nativism,” *Louisiana History* 20, no. 3 (Summer 1979): 265.

¹⁰¹ Tom Smith, *The Crescent City Lynchings: The Murder of Chief Hennessey, the New Orleans “Mafia” Trials, and the Parish Prison Mob* (Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2007), 219.; Botein, 272.

¹⁰² “Poor Start Makes a Fighting Finish,” *Times-Picayune*, October 3, 1904. Thanks to the timely intervention of a spectator to jam the gun’s hammer, Mendola survived, though he received a harsh beating.

¹⁰³ Louis J. Hennessey, *Diamond Jubilee: The Fair Grounds, New Orleans, Season 1947-1948* (New Orleans: New Orleans Fair Grounds Corporation, 1948), 46-47.

costs. The association believed that the resumption of organized racing would attract many tourists back to the city. The traffic manager of the Louisville and Nashville railroad offered passenger numbers to endorse that belief, adding that while the general attractions of New Orleans would make the city the biggest winter destination, he believed the principal draw was winter racing.¹⁰⁴ The relatively small size of the purses at the Fair Grounds would likely not be enough to attract the best racers, many of whom were racing in Canada, Mexico, and Cuba following the prohibition of gambling in even more states. The BMRA felt they needed to allow major concessions to attract the right crowd of horsemen, deciding to forego stall rent and licensing fees for trainers and valets. But their greatest initiative to grow interest was the re-establishment of “ladies’ days,” when women were admitted free of charge, to return “a social aspect ... that [racing] has not attained since the days of the old Metairie race course.”¹⁰⁵ If there was to be betting at these racing, it was informal and oral, between two people as in the days of the antebellum sport. By referencing the amateur antebellum turf through the Metairie race course and the ideal “gentlemanly” oral betting, the BMRA hoped to alleviate the anxieties of the public, fearful of the perceived corruption that followed the professional turfmen into the sport. The engagement of the honorable track judge Joseph A. Murphy for the 1916 races was another tactic in these public assurances. Murphy personally pledged to weed out the “objectionable element” in the sport.¹⁰⁶ Murphy believed that “there is not the slightest doubt that the Locke bill permits some form of betting,” and expressed his hope that once that form is determined the

¹⁰⁴ “Puts Racing First as an Attraction,” *Daily Racing Form*, December 22, 1914.

¹⁰⁵ “Fair Grounds Track in Good Condition,” *Daily Racing Form*, December 23, 1914.

¹⁰⁶ “Announce Plans for 1916,” *Daily Racing Form*, March 21, 1915.

racing association could “shape [its] business to conform to the law.”¹⁰⁷ The test cases sent to the Louisiana judicial system were the first step in the attempt to determine what form of betting the laws permitted.

The second step in the turfmen and gamblers’ plan to distinguish a legal betting style was effected through new allies in the state legislature. Since the Locke Law went into effect, there had been talk during each legislative session about introducing a new bill to amend that law and regulate the sport. In 1914, State Representative E.J. Reinhardt submitted a racing bill that would amend the Locke Law and allow “cities of 50,000 to vote whether they shall have racing under State Commission supervision.”¹⁰⁸ Though it was not initially taken seriously by the legislature, the racing interests candidly considered this their best chance to restore an orderly system of turf gambling. As they grew more vocal regarding the bill to restore pari-mutuel betting, they aroused the anger of anti-racing interest groups, provoking a coalition of women’s organizations and religious leaders to overrun the Capitol in opposition.¹⁰⁹ The New Orleans women announced their plans to boycott any and all businesses run by the supporters of the Reinhardt bill.¹¹⁰ The gambling coalition took advantage of a simultaneous measure to move the state capital to Alexandria. There had been numerous attempts to move the state capital after the establishment of Baton Rouge as the capital, using the “threat of removing the capital” as “a bargaining chip for causes proposed by any delegation,” but this proposal was stronger than the rest.¹¹¹ Boasting

¹⁰⁷ “Gamblers’ Scheme to Beat Governor,” *The Washington Times* (Washington, D.C.), January 26, 1909.

¹⁰⁸ “Resolution on Riparian Damages,” *The True Democrat* (St. Francisville, LA), May 30, 1914.

¹⁰⁹ “Racing Bill Is Given Its Quietus,” *The Caldwell Watchman* (Columbia, LA), June 19, 1914.

¹¹⁰ “Meeting Objections in Louisiana,” *Daily Racing Form*, June 3, 1914.

¹¹¹ Carol K. Haase, *Louisiana’s Old State Capitol* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing, 2009), 58.

a new hotel, rail system, as well as a location in the center of the state, the delegates from Alexandria tried to woo the legislators with a free building site and a half-million dollars for construction. It was reported that the New Orleans gambling interests sought an alliance with the delegates from Alexandria in order to get back at the legislators in Baton Rouge who had curtailed their livelihood. The New Orleans legislators were horse-trading with the delegation from Alexandria, bartering votes to move the capital to Alexandria if the Alexandrians would support the racing bill. Unfortunately for the racing interests, though, the state capital bill was the first to reach the floor of the House of Representatives, where it was defeated by a vote of 60 to 45.¹¹² When the Reinhardt racing bill reached the floor only hours later, the House voted to indefinitely postpone it by a vote of 55 to 50, the equivalent of killing it outright.¹¹³ Had the order of the votes been reversed, it is possible that the Reinhardt bill would have passed through the House, though it would have still had to pass through the Senate and be signed into law by Governor Luther Hall. This defeat was the closest the racing interests came to receiving legislative gambling reauthorization during the decade.

Another effort to establish a state racing commission came to the legislature in the summer of 1916 through a bill sponsored by Representatives Dan Ashford of Tensas Parish and Edward J. Schaff of New Orleans. This bill was primarily a revival of the Cordill bill of 1908, with some modifications to appease anti-racing forces. The Ashford-Schaff bill would allow the governor to appoint a three-member commission to license racing associations and races. To prevent corruption, the appointees could not own stock in a corporation for racing or breeding

¹¹² “Women in South Win Track Fight,” *Rock Island Argus* (Rock Island, IL), June 10, 1914.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

horses, nor could any two commission members belong to the same racing association.¹¹⁴ Local interests were protected by requiring the commission members to have lived in Louisiana for at least ten years, as well as requiring all track employees to be Louisiana residents.¹¹⁵ To protect the youth of the city, unaccompanied minors would be prohibited from attending horse races. Sabbatarian values would be upheld through the prohibition of Sunday racing. Finally, just like the Cordill bill, this racing bill would kill the small tracks in Jefferson and St. Bernard Parishes by refusing a license to “tracks of less than one mile in circumference within twenty-five miles of any city in this state of more than 100,000 population.”¹¹⁶ The bill’s proponents argued that they simply wanted to regulate the condition of betting that already existed, and the Ashford-Schaff bill would exist concurrently with the Locke law, merely amending the section on devices to allow pari-mutuel machines. Leading the crusade against this bill was the perennial opponent of New Orleans racing, progressive reformer Jean Gordon.¹¹⁷ Giving voice to women across the state, Gordon said that while the men of the city may support racing, “the mothers and women of this state don’t and they are going to speak in no uncertain terms.”¹¹⁸ Gordon’s speech during the hearing to bring the bill to the floor was the extent of the anti-racing advocacy, as no other speakers had come to the House to debate the bill. She had not come specifically to oppose it, as she was only in Baton Rouge to support a women’s suffrage bill that had been defeated the

¹¹⁴ “Racing Commission Bill Makes Season Dec. 1 to March 15,” *Times-Picayune*, June 9, 1916.

¹¹⁵ An exception was made however for the track manager, judges, starter, and racing secretary. These positions were generally filled by well-accomplished national turfmen to confer respectability and legitimacy to the proceedings of the track.

¹¹⁶ “Racing Commission Bill Makes Season Dec. 1 to March 15,” *Times-Picayune*, June 9, 1916.

¹¹⁷ “Hearing on Racing Blocked by Women,” *Times-Picayune*, June 22, 1916.

¹¹⁸ “Race Commission Pari-Mutuel Bill Wins on Hearing,” *Times-Picayune*, June 23, 1916.

previous day.¹¹⁹ In many respects, this is representative of the waning interest of anti-gambling activists. They still supported bans on gambling, but as women's suffrage and prohibition started to receive greater interest, the limited energies of the reformers shifted to these causes. When the House vote came up for the Ashford-Schaff racing bill, it was summarily defeated by a vote of 47 to 53 "without a touch of excitement and no debate."¹²⁰ While the Legislature was still inclined to prohibit a regulated system of race track gambling, the votes were moving closer to acceptance, much closer than the 87 to 20 vote for the Locke bill and similar to the 55 to 50 vote against the Reinhardt bill, though, with less activism.

Despite the legislative setbacks, the New Orleans racing men still undertook efforts to develop a system of gambling that worked within the letter of the law. By 1915, the jockey clubs were able to institute a system of oral betting at the New Orleans Fair Grounds that skirted the brink of legality. The oralizers working at the Fair Grounds were still occasionally liable to be arrested, but they were not punished severely should they ever be prosecuted and found guilty. Two important cases regarding the legality of oral betting came before the Supreme Court in the ensuing years. The first case was *State v. Austin*, decided in November 1917. After Edwin Austin was convicted under the Locke Law for "orally operating a betting book" he appealed to the courts to challenge the application of the law. The lower court had ruled that Austin was not using a "device" per the Locke law, so when the State appealed the decision, "that question of law was not before the Supreme Court for decision," and the decision would not affect the overall legality of the Locke law.¹²¹ Supreme Court Justice Walter B. Sommerville's opinion

¹¹⁹ "Legislature Gets Main Tax Measure of Administration," *Times-Picayune*, June 9, 1916.

¹²⁰ "Parkway Scheme Advanced; Racing Bill is Killed," *Times-Picayune*, June 28, 1916.

¹²¹ "Citizens' League Members Attack Pari-Mutuel Bill," *Times-Picayune*, May 9, 1920.

demonstrated how betting occurred at the track in the Court's interpretation. He argued that "the [Locke] act does not seek to punish gambling on horse racing between individuals who bet with the bookmaker or his assistants, or those who bet between themselves. The law refers to the professional gambler, the bookmaker, and his assistants who operating a betting book."¹²² While Austin was operating within the letter of the law since he was "not operating a betting book on a horse race, as that term was understood at the time of the passage of Act No. 57 of 1908," he violated the spirit of the law. It was the "intention of the Legislature... to punish the professional gambler who operated on race tracks by betting on horse races, and not the bettors who made the bets."¹²³ Nonetheless, using the strict literal reading that had been applied in the Hunsicker poolroom cases, the Court held that oral bookmaking – a misnomer as identified by Justice Charles O'Niell in his concurrence – did not fall within the meaning of the Locke law and the prior judgments should be annulled and reversed.¹²⁴

Even after this ruling, the police still harassed some bookmakers, leaving it to the courts to determine the legality of their arrests based on the circumstances of the betting arrangement. The Louisiana Supreme Court would uphold the *State v. Austin* decision in a similar case, *State v. Gardner*, announced in May 1922. This case effectively repealed the Locke law and ruled that oral betting was legal and allowed to continue in New Orleans. In its decision, the Supreme Court argued that the word "device" in the law is problematic as a broad reading of the letter of the law would ensnare many people "who now have no thought or conception that their acts are unlawful, and whose number can be limited only at the will and according to the opinion of

¹²² *State v. Austin*. 76 So. 809 (La. S. Ct. 1917).

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ Some lower court cases at this time broadly interpreted the word "device" in the Locke Law to mean the blank slip of paper which was provided for the bettor to use for his bet.

juries and judges, as to who should and who should not be punished under the statute,” a situation that was occurring even after the decision in *State v. Austin*.¹²⁵ The Louisiana Supreme Court’s opinion, as written by Associate Justice John St. Paul, argued that the letter of the law was unnecessarily broad enough to overreach the spirit of the law. As such, oral bookmaking does not constitute “other devices” as defined by the Locke law and gambling in Louisiana could continue under the oral betting system.¹²⁶ The path to pari-mutuel acceptance remained slow however. Another Supreme Court decision in *Talbot v. Truxillo* in 1925 saw the court uphold a “co-operative” system, which was essentially pari-mutuel betting without any mechanical devices. It was believed that this would “purify the manner of gambling on horse racing by eliminating the bookmakers who have been euphemistically termed ‘oralizers’” who were taking advantage of legal loopholes.¹²⁷ By the end of the decade, the state legislature reauthorized the use of pari-mutuel machines, completing the repeal of the Locke law.¹²⁸

Though there were some token races during the years the Locke law remained in effect, it was not until 1918 that regular horse racing returned to New Orleans, coming back from an

¹²⁵ *State v. Gardner*. 92 So. 368 (La. S. Ct. 1922).

¹²⁶ The Court ruled that the oral betting system adopted at the Fair Grounds by 1915 did not constitute a “device” per the Locke Law. They held that the word “device” applied to the mechanical devices such as pari-mutuel machines and the older bookmaking method with a more organized written record.

¹²⁷ “Modified Mutuel Betting Upheld on State Tracks,” *Times-Picayune*, June 23, 1925.

¹²⁸ Despite the legislative approval of pari-mutuel gambling, the Louisiana courts did not authorize it until the 1954 case, *Gandolfo v. Louisiana State Racing Commission*. See also, Lee Hargrave, “Ruminations: Mandates in the Louisiana Constitution of 1974; How Did They Fare?” *Louisiana Law Review* 58, no. 2 (Winter 1998): 402-405.

effective ten year hiatus.¹²⁹ Unable to sustain membership and racing needs, the Jockey Clubs had disbanded, and the Business Men's Racing Association attracted the scattered club members under a united umbrella.¹³⁰ This new association did not just include the traditional turfmen, but claimed to represent the greater commercial interests of New Orleans, including hoteliers, restaurateurs, and shop owners.¹³¹ When a new syndicate arose in 1916 and attempted to revive the City Park track, the BMRA sought to buy them out, viewing the gambling focus of the syndicate as detrimental to their progress in winning back public support for racing. This progress was extremely slow, however, and the lack of demand for racing during the lean years destroyed the competition between the Fair Grounds and City Park, leading to the closure of the City Park track. By 1920, all that remained in the Crescent City was the track at the New Orleans Fair Grounds. The Fair Grounds Association purchased the City Park land, and after appropriating the grandstand from the defunct course, donated the land to the city.¹³² The transfer of the grandstand symbolically unified the New Orleans tracks and racing associations that had long been at odds. With a united organization at the helm of the sport, there was hope for another revival of New Orleans racing. But it was too late for the sport of kings. Though turfmen would publish reports referring to the continued success of the Fair Grounds track, demand for horse racing had reached unprecedented lows as the citizens of New Orleans had moved on to other spectator sports, like baseball, that reflected the changing values in society. While the New

¹²⁹ Other sources claim that racing resumed in 1915, leaving a six/seven year gap, but the races from 1915 to 1918, as well as the token races during that gap, were sporadic, tempered by fear of arrest, and did not appeal to many national turfmen.

¹³⁰ The new name also demonstrates the rhetorical shift from a sporting association, e.g. a "jockey club," to a professional association, i.e. the racing association of "business men."

¹³¹ "Rival Race Track May Undo Work of Past Two Years," *Times-Picayune*, August 9, 1916.

¹³² Hennessey, 46.; "Fair Ground Deal Big Development of the Past Week," *Times-Picayune*, January 7, 1917.

Orleans turf association achieved success in the “search for order,” the process of bureaucratization as identified by Robert Wiebe involved a “fundamental shift in values... [stressing] efficiency, continuity, systematic controls, and group action.”¹³³ Horse racing no longer spoke to the desires of the citizens of New Orleans.

As control over the New Orleans turf was being contested at the turn of the twentieth century, reform forces seized upon claims of corruption and deceit. They received a public mandate to reign in the excesses of the sport. Instead of a system of internal reform through the jockey clubs, external reform from the arena of state politics was almost inevitable because of the extent to which the racing interests were united with civic authorities in the city. Despite the settlement of the racial issue through the exclusion of black jockeys and trainers, the assault on race track gambling was amplified by progressive and moral reformers. Tying together concepts of morality with race relations and social order, evangelicals objected to “any recreations – gambling, for example, or drunkenness – that threatened the home with the roughness and near-savagery associated with black culture.”¹³⁴ There was a strong desire to return to the antebellum form of racing that emphasized honor culture through individual betting as a means to restore class order in society, casting out the bookmakers and professional sportsmen. The expansion from controlling the morality of the home to political action was best characterized by a speaker at a Louisiana agricultural fair in 1907 who said “the State is only the home on a larger scale.”¹³⁵ These moral reformers enlisted representatives in the Louisiana government to pass legislation

¹³³ Louis Galambos, “The Emerging Organizational Synthesis in Modern American History,” *Business History Review* 44, no. 3 (Autumn 1970): 288.

¹³⁴ Ownby, 17.

¹³⁵ Sallie Colvin, in Louisiana Department of Agriculture, *Farmers Institute Report*, 1907, 15.; Quoted in Ownby, 182.

prohibiting race track gambling. One fatal flaw in the legislation led to its varied interpretation among three arenas of law and order: the legislature, who created the law; the police, who enforced the law; and the courts, who provided the final interpretation of the law. The failure of these three bodies to consistently deliver a united message on the Locke law left the status of race track gambling in limbo for almost a decade – a position the jockey clubs hoped to avoid when they supported earlier efforts at reform legislation. Though the racing interests would put forth a compelling case for regulation – and they would continue to do so throughout the years of prohibition – they ran out of steam coming down the homestretch, ceding victory to the Locke law and the culture of control.

CONCLUSION

The race track's powerful societal influence had all but disappeared by 1920. The changes regarding race relations, class conflict, and religious reform had all reached a consolidated consensus after World War I. The entrenchment of Jim Crow in New Orleans gave legal sanction to segregation laws that applied to all areas of society, including streetcars, hotels, restaurants, schools, and sporting entertainment. These laws "had little to do with altering the existing behavior of most blacks and whites in New Orleans," argues historian Donald DeVore. Instead, "they represented the ideological statement of a dominant group."¹ African-Americans did not completely disappear from the turf, but those who remained were no longer in highly visible positions, staying on in servile positions like that of trainer or groom.² They were also mainly found on smaller tracks with local racers.³ There were no more Isaac Murphys wielding "Black Cool," or other champions of hope like him on the track. Journalist Evan Narcisse argues that Black Cool is not an end, but rather "a means to one. It's a coping mechanism for existing in a world that's denigrated and dehumanized you. It's a way to freeze off the small slights and mega-disenfranchisements."⁴ Seeing no hope in the world of the turf, "the collective dreams and

¹ Donald E. DeVore, *Defying Jim Crow: African American Community Development and the Struggle for Racial Equality in New Orleans, 1900-1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), 25.

² Since the 1930s, there have only been three black trainers in the Kentucky Derby. James Robert Saunders and Monica Renae Saunders, *Black Winning Jockeys in the Kentucky Derby* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2003), 106-107.

³ The final two black jockeys in the Kentucky Derby before 2000 were Jess Conley in 1911 and Henry King in 1921, both of whom performed poorly. In Conley's case, his last Derby mount before then was in 1899 and he was well past retirement by 1911. Little is known of Henry King outside of this one race.

⁴ Evan Narcisse, "The Natural: The Trouble Portraying Blackness in Video Games," Kotaku, October 14, 2015, <http://kotaku.com/the-natural-the-trouble-portraying-blackness-in-video-1736504384>. Accessed October 20, 2015.

aspirations of African Americans had been transformed into a nightmare” they were disfranchised in the 1892 Constitution and lynch law was imposed on Louisiana society.⁵

The power shift in Louisiana after the Civil War supplanted the planter aristocracy with a new professional class, among which could be found the sportsman. After the dissolution of the New Louisiana Jockey Club, control of the New Orleans tracks fell solely to the professional sportsmen and gamblers. The ambitions of the New South were initiated within the racing world by some members of the planter aristocracy who sought to restore the former glory of New Orleans racing. These objectives were only realized, however, through the later efforts of the professional sportsmen who divorced the sport from its antebellum honor, instead wedding it to progress and democratization. They capitalized on a culture of chance, one that grew out of “a consumer culture [that] encouraged many middle-class men, faced with lowered career expectations, to find identity in leisure instead of in work.”⁶ By 1920 though, horse racing remained solidly in the hands of professional sportsmen and gamblers.

Opposing the culture of chance, of which “gambling remained a powerful metaphor for everyday life,” was the “culture of control.”⁷ Hostile toward the unrestrained economic forces in the nation, the people who favored control clung to a worldview of “evangelical rationality,” that considered gambling to be part of a greater struggle for civilization, manhood, and enlightenment.⁸ These religious and moral reformers set their sights on enacting national prohibition, encouraged by the success of anti-gambling laws that swept through most states.

⁵ DeVore, 30.

⁶ Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 13.

⁷ T.J. Jackson Lears, *Something for Nothing: Luck in America* (New York: Viking, 2003), 150.

⁸ Lears, 150.

They achieved victory when Congress passed the Volstead Act in October 1919, providing enforcement power for the Eighteenth Amendment establishment of Prohibition. By January 1920, the United States was legally declared to be “dry.” The emerging consensus around racial hierarchies, the social class in control of the sport, and the moral reformers on legislating sin also had its counterpart in the New Orleans turf. Despite years of competition between the Metairie Park clubs, the City Park clubs, and the Fair Grounds clubs, when City Park closed in 1915, it left the Fair Grounds as the only remaining horse track in the city. The Fair Grounds reinforced the unification symbolically by replacing their grandstand that was destroyed in a 1919 fire with the former grandstand from City Park.

By 1920, many states allowed race-tracks to reopen with certain restrictions on gambling methods.⁹ Some of the legendary tracks of yesteryear remained shuttered, however, as their jockey clubs had disbanded during the gambling prohibition or they could not afford the costs of restarting a horse track. The reduction in the number of tracks also reflected the decrease in public demand for the sport. The American public instead found itself drawn to the ball park, and organized baseball began its golden age.¹⁰ The success of baseball came from its accessibility to the urban experience. Baseball appealed to the urban masses and it demonstrated the same qualities of efficiency and excellence that served as “keys to success in industrial America.”¹¹ Historian Frederic Paxson explains the success of baseball over horse racing and boxing in its

⁹ Those states that did not yet allow pari-mutuel gambling would authorize it during the Great Depression, with the hope of taxing any revenue. Michael Nelson and John Lyman Mason, *How the South Joined the Gambling Nation: The Politics of State Policy Innovation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 3.

¹⁰ For more on the rise of organized baseball, see Harold Seymour, *Baseball*. Vol. 2: The Golden Age. 3 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

¹¹ Gunther Barth, *City People: The Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 180.

ability to “[turn] the city lot into a playground and the small boy into an enthusiastic player.”¹² Baseball displaced horse racing because it was a better fit for the American urban environment and it had lower barriers to entry for participation.¹³

Racing by the mid-twentieth century had long passed its peak as a popular sport among the general public. People might have still followed the Kentucky Derby or the Preakness when they were run, but the crowds that thronged at the Fair Grounds would never again reach the heights they did in the 1880s and 1890s. But just as the businessmen of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era still considered the sport a means of achieving and maintaining social status, that popular conception remained throughout the twentieth century. Racing was again a sport for the rich, as Belmont insisted, but in Louisiana, the sport attracted mostly the nouveaux riche and very few of the well-born. Since the incorporation of gambling as a systemic institution at the race tracks, the rhetoric of horse racing has had a dichotomous nature. Horse racing is simultaneously high-culture and low-brow, depending on whether one discusses gambling when talking horses. Louisiana Governor Huey Long provides an excellent example of this rhetoric. At the prime of his career, as Long prepared to enter yet another slimy, mud-slinging political brawl, he gleefully remarked to a friend that politics “is the sport of kings.”¹⁴ Long’s statement, referring to the elite nature of politics and the vulgar tactics of demagoguery, demonstrates that the rhetoric of horse racing still had meaning to the people of Louisiana.

¹² Frederic L. Paxson, “The Rise of Sport,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 4, no. 2 (September 1917): 152-153.

¹³ Participation here is defined as the ability to actively take part in the sport, beyond the role of spectator. Attendees at the race tracks may have been deemed to be “participating” in the world of the turf, but they were not participating in the race itself, only the gambling.

¹⁴ T. Harry Williams, *Huey Long*, 1st Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 108.

This rhetoric is best evidenced through two Louisiana politicians: Earl Long and deLesseps “Chep” Morrison. Huey’s brother, Governor Earl Long, was an avid horse racing aficionado. One acquaintance characterized Earl as “tight with his money. The one thing he’s never been tight about is horse betting. He can’t stop.”¹⁵ After his release from a mental hospital, Earl “departed on a long tour of recuperation at out-of-state Western race tracks that most of the lay public had never heard of before he hit them,” ending up in Hot Springs in Arkansas, “a resort famous for reconditioning old prize fighters and race horses.”¹⁶ Whereas track gambling was seen as an amusing characteristic of “Uncle Earl,” it was used to allege corruption and disorder in the administration of New Orleans Mayor “Chep” Morrison. An opponent of Morrison’s administration, Eighth Ward Representative C. Fred Donaldson, alleged that the city was on the verge of bankruptcy under Morrison’s watch. Donaldson “contended that the mayor telephoned the Fair Grounds racetrack each night during the racing season to learn what the municipal share of the track receipts would be for that day. Morrison then used this knowledge to determine city operating expenses for the next day.”¹⁷ Donaldson’s story is unlikely to be true, yet it emphasizes that the race track was not only an important source of revenue for the city, but also an institution about which the public held strong opinions. Morrison also provides an excellent example of the deeper motives that underwrite moral arguments. He wrote a letter to Governor Robert Kennon in 1953, pleading for the governor to prevent night racing in the metropolitan district. Morrison contended that “a dual racing season would injure department stores, groceries, and other businesses in the area and that night racing was an evil which preyed

¹⁵ A.J. Liebling, *The Earl of Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 42.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁷ Edward F. Haas, *DeLesseps S. Morrison and the Image of Reform: New Orleans Politics, 1946-1961*, Louisiana Paperback Ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1986), 172.

largely upon the poor man who worked during the day and went to the track at night.”¹⁸ At the root of the issue though, was the fact that the proposed night track would have been in Jefferson Parish, and should it be permitted to run, tax revenue from that track would benefit Jefferson Parish, not Orleans Parish and New Orleans. Even in the 1950s, arguments over the New Orleans race tracks continued to focus on morality as a means of hiding the reality of self-interest.

Louisiana currently has four race tracks that offer live horse racing – Louisiana Downs in Bossier City; Delta Downs in Vinton; Evangeline Downs in Lafayette; and the Fair Grounds in New Orleans. While they were important local institutions, the tracks had generally languished through the end of the twentieth century. After the Louisiana legislature legalized casino gambling in the 1990s, it struck a blow to the tracks that further threatened their stability as they lost many patrons to other forms of gambling.¹⁹ The track owners petitioned the state legislature to allow them to become “racinos,” citing examples of other Southern tracks saved from the brink of failure by creating slot machine parlors.²⁰ After Governor Mike Foster signed the racino bill in 1997, the tracks were quickly purchased by national corporations that revitalized the local racing scene. Despite the resurgence of the Louisiana track, also stimulated by the national acclaim received by the Cajun jockeys from Bayou Country, the tracks still could not survive without gambling.²¹ Unlike the situation over a century ago however, it was now *slots*, not track betting, that kept the doors open.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 172.

¹⁹ The legislature was able to authorize gambling despite the Constitutional injunction to suppress it by defining the services provided by the casino as “gaming” instead of gambling.

²⁰ Nelson and Mason, 213.

²¹ For a sample article regarding the bush track jockeys, see Dave Joseph, “Small town in ‘Bayou Country’ home to many jockeys,” *Ocala Star Banner*, February 18, 1993.

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APPENDIX: PARI-MUTUEL GAMBLING

For further explanation of how a pari-mutuel betting pool would work, along with the changing odds, here is a hypothetical horse race with five participants (and a 5% commission):

At the beginning of the day, the track handicapper, the local “expert” on predicting winners, estimates what the final odds will be for each horse to win. If this were a fixed-odds system, his role would be that of the bookie who sets the stable odds on the morning of the race. The handicapper’s prediction is then printed in the track program as “the morning line.” In this hypothetical horse race, the morning line is set as such.

Horses	Morning Line Odds	Payout on a \$1 Bet
Horse A	3-to-1	\$4.00
Horse B	3-to-2	\$2.50
Horse C	30-to-1	\$31.00
Horse D	6-to-1	\$7.00
Horse E	5-to-1	\$6.00

As people enter the racetrack, they read the morning betting line and make a decision as to whether they believe its accuracy and will bet in accordance with it. Thirty minutes before post-time for this hypothetical race, the tote board, the sign that shows the amounts bet on each horse and its approximate odds to win, reads very differently from the morning line.

Horses	Total Wagered On Each Horse	Odds Based on Wagers	Payout on a \$1 Bet
Horse A	\$75	5-to-1	\$6.33
Horse B	\$125	3-to-1	\$3.80
Horse C	\$25	18-to-1	\$19.00
Horse D	\$200	2-to-1	\$2.38
Horse E	\$75	5-to-1	\$6.33

The odds decreased for Horses A and B, increased for Horses C and D, and stayed the same for Horse E. There could be any number of reasons for why the odds changed. The betting crowd might have thought that Horses A and B were over-rated by the handicapper, and Horses

C and D were under-rated. They might have seen something special in Horse D during the paddock parade, or noticed some sluggishness in Horses A and B. The odds on Horse C may have improved drastically if this were a race near the end of the day when the gamblers who lost money at the track were looking for one big long-shot winner to recoup their losses.

At post-time, the betting windows close, and the odds are finalized. The final wagers and odds for this race read:

Horses	Total Wagered On Each Horse	Odds Based on Wagers	Payout on a \$1 Bet
Horse A	\$150	5-to-1	\$6.33
Horse B	\$300	2-to-1	\$3.16
Horse C	\$100	8-to-1 (approx.)	\$9.50
Horse D	\$250	3-to-1	\$3.80
Horse E	\$200	4-to-1	\$4.75

The total amount of money in the wagering pool is \$1000. The state/racing agency takes its 5% commission, leaving \$950 in the pot. Assume that Horse D wins the race. The \$950 is then awarded to those bettors who wagered on Horse D: $\$950 / \$250 = \$3.8$ per \$1 wagered. Thus, the payout would return the \$1 bet and an additional \$2.80 profit. Therefore, the odds for Horse B would be approximately 3-to-1. The pari-mutuel system can be seen as a more democratic one, as it removed the possibly crooked bookmaker from the scenario, who sets betting lines in search of his own profit, and allows the people to wager among themselves, with the track and/or state charging a small percentage commission for the facilitation of bets.

VITA

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