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A “Southern Tradition?”: Stockcar Racing as Contextual Tradition

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A “SOUTHERN TRADITION?”: STOCKCAR RACING AS CONTEXTUAL
TRADITION

by

Patrick A. Lindsay

A Thesis
Submitted to the
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requirements of the
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A “SOUTHERN TRADITION?”: STOCKCAR RACING AS CONTEXTUAL TRADITION

Patrick Lindsay, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 2006

A large number of academics who have examined stockcar racing have concluded that stockcar racing is a “Southern tradition.” While the implicit definitions of tradition may vary, many generally agree that there is a clear historical relationship between stock car racing and the South. It is my contention that the idea that stockcar racing is a “Southern” tradition does not represent the reality of stockcar racing fandom for many people outside of the South. I assert that stock car racing is instead a “contextual tradition”, a practice that became labeled a tradition through specific historical and cultural circumstances. By examining the idea that stock car racing is a “Southern tradition” in relation to the history of stockcar racing outside of the South and local cultural understandings of stockcar racing at City Speedway (a Midwestern stock car racing track), I hope to show that there are historical and cultural relationships between stockcar racing and regions outside of the South. These historical and cultural relationships indicate that the relationship between stock car racing and the “South” is far more complex than that posited by most academics.

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Patrick Lindsay

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A line of stock cars, two wide, follow a truck with flashing lights, slowly meandering around a paved oval, race track. Over the steady hum of engines, one can hear the names of each of the drivers announced over loudspeakers. After several laps following the truck, the crowd is restless. One can hear murmurs of discontent from the crowd. “Why don’t they start the race?” some say. Then, it happens. The truck turns off its lights and drives into the pit area of the racetrack. Now, nothing is holding the cars back. The race is about to begin. The crowd is on its feet. The stock cars begin to steadily gain speed as they move towards the finish line. They hit the finish line as the green flag waves and now, for several laps, it is every driver for him or herself. Cars speed around the track; passing each other at speeds higher than most people would drive on the highway. After a number of laps, it is time to end the race. The checker flag waves as the driver in first place crosses the finish line. A winner (or winners) is declared and now, the crowd can go home.

On weekends, throughout much of the year, a scenario similar to the one described above occurs at hundreds of stock car racing tracks across the country. Stock car racing is both an extremely popular sport among many Americans and a multimillion-dollar industry. Hundreds of thousands of spectators attend races most weekends while millions of viewers watch some form of stock car racing on television. Millions of dollars are spent on racing memorabilia, travel to races, tickets and at the concession stands at tracks.

Despite being a popular, multimillion-dollar sport which exists in many different forms across the United States (and parts of Canada), stock car racing has attracted little notice among academics in the social sciences. Those academics who have done social research examining stock car racing have examined stock car racing in relation to the American South at the expense of other regions or questions unrelated to the South. A surprisingly large number of academics who have examined stock car racing (primarily geographers and historians) have concluded that stock car racing is a “Southern tradition”. While the implicit definitions of tradition used may vary, they generally agree that there is a clear historical relationship between stock car racing and the “South.”

The argument that stock car racing is a “Southern tradition” is primarily based on a problematic understanding of stock car racing’s current organization. At present, NASCAR (the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing) is the dominant stock car racing organizing body in the United States. Most academics (and popular authors) examining stock car racing problematically conflate NASCAR with stock car racing. While they may acknowledge that stock car racing came into existence before the founding of NASCAR, they generally see the history of NASCAR as representative of the history of stock car racing after 1949 (the date that NASCAR was founded). Since some major aspects of NASCAR’s history have been related to the American “South” (e.g., the location of the first NASCAR superspeedways and the location of Bill France, the founder of NASCAR [Wright 2002]), this conflation of stock car racing and NASCAR has led a number of authors to argue that stock car racing is historically a “Southern” phenomenon.

By defining stock car racing as a “Southern” tradition, most academics examining stock car racing seem unaware of larger criticisms of the “tradition” concept by historians and anthropologists. The implicit concepts of tradition used by these academic examining stock car racing are similar to older ideas about tradition that have largely fell out of favor in anthropology. By using these concepts of tradition, they are replicating many of the problems of earlier ideas about tradition. Primarily, they are assuming that at some point during stock car racing’s history, some aspects of stock car racing were fixed and stable.

It is the central premise of this thesis that the relationship between stock car racing, history and the South is far more complex than that posited by academics. Stock car racing is not a “Southern tradition” as most academics argue but is in actuality a contextual tradition, a practice that became labeled a tradition through specific historical and cultural circumstances. Based on some aspects of the invented tradition perspective (used by historians and anthropologists), the contextual tradition perspective is one that I have developed in order to critique older, implicit ideas about tradition. The main assertion of the invented tradition perspective is that some or all practices that one labels as tradition do not necessarily have the temporal depth or symbolic continuity necessary for a practice to be labeled a “real” tradition. However, for many, the use of the word “invented” in “invented tradition” has been problematically conflated with fabrication or purposeful creation. The use of the word contextual in “contextual tradition” is meant to correct for this problem by differentiating between practices that became labeled as traditions because of

purposeful fraud or creation (i.e. “invention”) and those that became labeled as traditions because of specific historical and cultural circumstances (i.e. “context”).

The primary evidence for this thesis is based upon an examination of documentary evidence (primarily academic examinations of stock car racing and articles on various websites) and an ethnographic case study conducted at City Speedway, a pseudonymously named stock car racing track in a Midwestern state. From May 2005 to September 2005, I conducted ethnographic research that sought to determine the relationship between stock car racing and “Southern” identity. If, as argued above, stock car racing is a contextual tradition of the “South” then those fans at non-Southern racing tracks might have different cultural understandings of the relationship between stock car racing and the “South.” Since many academics (and some members of the general public) view stock car racing as a “Southern Tradition,” I focused my case study on three specific questions related to stock car racing and identity: 1. What was the relationship between NASCAR, the track and the fans? 2. What is the relationship between local stock car racing history and City Speedway? 3. Were symbols of Southern, American or local values present at the track? By answering these three questions, I was able to determine whether or not academic interpretations of stock car racing history and identity were correct.

By examining the idea that stock car racing is a “Southern tradition” in relation to the history of stock car racing outside of the South, wider cultural understandings of the relationship between stock car racing and the South, and the local cultural understandings of stock car racing at City Speedway, I hope to show that there are historical and cultural relationships between stock car racing and

regions outside of the South. There is a history of stock car racing outside of the South that is as deep as the history of stock car racing within the South. While there may be wider cultural associations between stock car racing and the South, it is clear that in some areas outside of the South, local stock car racing history is far more important to fans than “Southern” stock car racing history. This indicates that the “South” does not have an exclusive claim to stock car’s history, “culture” or “values.”

In the following chapters I examine in more depth the idea that stockcar racing is a “Southern Tradition.” Chapters 2 through 6 examine the central premises of most academic examinations of stock car racing and the documentary evidence that puts these premises in doubt. In Chapter 2, I focus on the main assertions made in most academic examinations of stock car racing. I examine why most academics see stock car racing as a “Southern tradition” and how they portray the relationship between stock car racing and “Southern values” or “Southern culture.” In Chapter 3, I examine how academic understandings of the “Southern tradition” of stock car racing are implicitly similar to older theories of tradition. In Chapter 4, I examine the idea that stock car racing is a “Southern tradition” in relation to the “invention of tradition” perspective and my modified version of it, the “contextual tradition” perspective. I argue that stock car racing is a “contextual tradition,” a practice that became labeled a tradition through specific historical and cultural circumstances. In Chapter 5, I describe some aspects of the “non-Southern” history of stock car racing that indicate that stock car racing has a historical relationship with areas beyond the “South.” In Chapter 6, I briefly examine the wider (i.e. non-academic) cultural

associations between stock car racing and the “South” that may have influenced some academics.

Chapters 7 through 9 focus on my case study at City Speedway. In Chapter 7, I discuss my case study of City Speedway, the ethnographic methodology that I employed to get data and problems I encountered during my research. In Chapter 8, I discuss how I defined stock car racing fans at City Speedway. Since my case study focuses on stock car racing fans, it is important that I define how I am using the word “fan.” In Chapter 9, I describe the general features of City Speedway. I specifically describe the physical layout of the track and the general traits of drivers and fans that I observed. In Chapter 10, I document the results of my case study in relation to the three central questions mentioned above.

Chapter 10 concludes the thesis. I begin with a brief discussion of the implications of my case study. Following this, I reiterate the conclusions of this thesis. Finally, I recommend possible areas of study for future social science research.

Definitions

It is important to define stock car racing, NASCAR and THE NEXTEL Cup Series since these definitions form the basis of a number of the arguments made within this paper. In the early-to-mid twentieth century, the term “stock car” referred to standard models of cars that were used for automobile racing (Howell 1997). In other words, cars that were not specifically built to be racecars but that were available to the general non-race driving public. Beginning in the 1950’s and the early 1960’s, various stock car racing series allowed stock cars to be modified in various ways

(within a certain range of specifications) to enhance their performance and speed on the race track (Howell 1997; Nascar.com). As time progressed stock cars became so modified that they could no longer be seen as equivalent to the standard model that they represented. As a result the definition for what constitutes a stock car seems to have shifted.

Today, “stock car” seems to refer to any racecar whose body looks like an automobile that could have been sold to the general public (either in the present or in the past). Because of this shift in definition, cars that are specifically made for racing can be defined as “stock cars” as long as the body of the car looks like the body of a “regular” car (Howell 1997). Thus, NASCAR NEXTEL Cup Cars which have the bodies of specific models of Fords, Chevies and Dodges can be defined as stock cars despite the fact that they may have been specifically made for racing (and as a result be made of parts not available to the general public). In contrast, a Formula 1 racecar could not be defined as a stock car since its jet like body looks nothing like that of a “regular” car. For the purposes of this paper, the “modern” definition of stock car will be employed since this definition seems to be the one most widely used by most fans and authors.

NASCAR is the “official” acronym for the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing. Originally founded in 1949, the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing has become the dominant automobile racing organization that regulates, organizes and markets stock car races among a number of different tracks throughout the United States and parts of Canada (Howell 1997, Wright 2002). For NASCAR, this includes national racing series (e.g. the NEXTEL Cup Racing Series, the Busch

Racing), regional racing series (e.g. The Busch North Racing Series and the NASCAR Autozone Elite Division Southwest Series), and local racing (through the NASCAR Dodge Weekly Racing Series) (www.nascar.com). These racing series are ranked within NASCAR with the NEXTEL Cup Racing Series designated as the highest division of NASCAR and the Dodge Weekly Series designated as the lowest division in NASCAR (www.nascar.com).

The NEXTEL Cup Racing Series is the highest division of racing within NASCAR. The NEXTEL Cup series was originally called the Winston Cup Racing Series. Founded in 1971 through a sponsorship deal with the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Corporation (owner of Winston Cigarettes), the Winston Cup Series replaced the previous top racing division in NASCAR, the Grand National (Girdler 1988). Unlike the Grand National, money for prizes came from the sponsor of the series, R.J. Reynolds, instead of NASCAR itself (Girdler 1988). In 2003 the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company stopped sponsoring NASCAR races. With the replacement of this sponsor by NEXTEL, a telecommunications company, the Winston Cup Racing Series had its name changed to the NEXTEL Cup Racing Series (MacGregor 2005). Beyond the changes in the championship points system in 2004, the change from Winston Cup to NEXTEL Cup does not appear to have changed the organization of NASCAR's top division.

These definitions are particularly important because how academics or fans perceive stock car racing, NASCAR and/or NEXTEL Cup helps determine how they relate regional, local or national identities to stock car racing. Throughout this paper I will explore how the perceived relationships between stock car racing and NASCAR

affect academic understandings of stock car racing's history and how some stock car fans actually relate to stock racing, NASCAR and NEXTEL Cup. In doing so, I hope to show that the relationship between stock car racing, history and the South is far more complex than that posited by most academics examining stock car racing.

CHAPTER 2

ACADEMIC EXAMINATIONS OF STOCK CAR RACING

There have been a limited number of examinations of stock car racing among academics. The majority of academic works examining the “culture” of stock car racing (as opposed to the engineering or “science” of stock car racing) have been produced by geographers and historians. There has been no anthropological work examining stock car racing (beyond references online to a UCSC graduate student writing a Ph.D. dissertation). Sociological work examining stock car racing has primarily focused on NASCAR as an entity separate from stock car racing and have largely been limited in scope. Sociological examinations of NASCAR by Rufenacht and Groves (1997) and Spann (2002) have largely concluded that their discipline should engage in more research on this topic. Rufenacht and Groves examination of NASCAR focuses on what sponsored products NASCAR fans buy. They argue that some fans buy more sponsored products than other fans and that more research needs to be done to determine why this difference exists. Spann’s examination of NASCAR is an extended discussion of why sociologists should examine NASCAR fans. Spann concludes that sociologists should engage in empirical research of NASCAR since it is interesting and since “no” empirical research has been done. These studies are largely irrelevant since they provide very little useful information about stock car racing or NASCAR (other than to say that more research needs to be done).

Wright (2002) is the only sociologist to have examined stock car racing in any depth. He has specifically focused his research on NASCAR. His book, Fixin’ to Git: One Fan’s Love Affair with NASCAR’s Winston Cup, seems to be aimed at a

popular audience. There is a distinct lack of technical jargon in the book and the author often uses colloquial language (e.g. referring to a particularly racist fan at one race as a “drunken ass”).

The book primarily seems to be an attempt to argue against negative stereotypes of NASCAR fans as “ignorant rednecks.” Wright (2002) argues that NASCAR fandom represents an American “subculture” that crosscuts class and gender (though it is primarily white in composition). It is a subculture because there are certain features of NASCAR fandom that make them “different” than other Americans (though not in a negative way). These differences are primarily related to differences in language use (i.e. understanding specific technical terminology related to stock car racing and NASCAR), wearing distinctive dress at races (e.g. t-shirts, hats, etc. related to specific NASCAR drivers), a symbolic connection to rural America (even if one is from an urban area) and an emphasis on certain “traditional American values” (individualism, freedom, community and mobility). However, not all members of the subculture exhibit all of these various features. These various features represent a range of behaviors and ideas associated with NASCAR. Thus, one could be considered a member of the NASCAR “subculture” through his or her understanding of terminology and dress at races even if one did not share certain values or a connection to rural America.

While Wright (2002) does allow for subjectivity among NASCAR fans in that one does not have to share all aspects of NASCAR’s “subculture” to be considered a fan, it is unclear why Wright sees NASCAR as connected to rural America and specific “values.” Wright vaguely defines the connection to the rural primarily in

terms outdoor activities (owning guns, hunting, fishing, camping, etc.) while the primary evidence for “traditional American values” is the presence of pre-race prayers at NASCAR events and taking one’s hat off during the national anthem. It is unclear why “outdoor” activities are necessarily associated with the rural since “extreme” sports and other “suburban” activities have become associated with camping and other outdoor activities. It is unclear why a pre-race prayer or taking one’s hat off during the national anthem represents “traditional American values” since these practices exist at numerous sporting events throughout the United States. Because of these problems, it is unclear in Wright’s analysis what makes stock car racing distinct from other forms of sports fandom which also have their own sport specific language and dress. This would seem to imply that NASCAR fans are equivalent to other sports fans and not necessarily a distinct “sub-culture.”

Examinations of stock car racing by historians and geographers have generally not shared Wright’s view of NASCAR as an American “subculture.” Instead, they have primarily focused on the supposed relationship between stock car racing and the “South.” With the exception of Howell (1997) who has focused on the history of NASCAR’s Winston Cup, historians examining stock car racing have specifically focused on the period during the 1950’s and 1960’s (Daniel 2000; Pierce 2001). Geographers have focused their examination of stock car racing on the period from the founding of NASCAR to today (Pillsbury 1995 [1975]; Pillsbury 1995 [1989]; Alderman et al. 2003; Hurt 2005).

Most historians and geographers (and popular authors) examining stock car racing problematically conflate NASCAR with stock car racing. While they may

acknowledge that stock car racing came into existence before the founding of NASCAR, they generally see the history of NASCAR as representative of the history of stock car racing after 1949 (the date that NASCAR was founded). Thus, while some of their work may be ostensibly about NASCAR, they assume that NASCAR and stock car racing are inseparable. For example, Hurt (2005) in his geographic examination of NASCAR uses the “official” definition of NASCAR but also defines NASCAR as a “sport.” In doing so, he implies that stock car racing and NASCAR are one in the same.

The assumption that NASCAR’s history represents stock car racing history is unlike other sports whose histories are not solely dependent on the history of their major sports leagues or major competition structures (e.g. golf or football). This has important implications for their interpretations of the cultural significance of stock car racing. Some major aspects of NASCAR’s history have been related to the American “South” (e.g.. the location of the first NASCAR superspeedways and the location of Bill France, the founder of NASCAR [Wright 2002]). This has lead a number of authors to argue that stock car racing is historically a “Southern” phenomenon. In turn, this has meant that most academic examinations of stock car racing have focused on the South.

With the exception of Wright, the majority of academics examining stock car racing agree that before the 1980’s, stock car racing was a “Southern” tradition. The idea that NASCAR is a “Southern tradition” is largely based on the assumption that before the 1980’s, “working-class” “Southerners” had a special cultural relationship with automobiles. Emblematic of this approach are Daniel’s views on the cultural

relationship between stock car racing and the “South.” In his book Lost Revolutions, Daniel (2000), a historian examining race relations in the 1950’s “South,” devotes a chapter to examining stock car racing. Daniel argues that post-World War II:

Southerner’s manifested an inordinate interest in automobiles. With aggressive drivers, fast cars and wild fans, automobile became the ultimate working-class sport. Stock car racing attracted a segment of southern [sic] society that was proudly boisterous. In a decade when many frustrated middle-class Americans were searching for lost meanings, lowdown southerners [sic] wallowed in authenticity. [Daniel 2000: 93]

This portrayal of post-WWII stock car fans could be viewed as either a positive or negative statement on the presumed relationship between the “South” and stock car racing. One could interpret Daniel’s statement as an argument for a “primitive” or primal connection between “Southerners” and stock car racing. Fans are “wild” and “proudly boisterous” and attracted to the primal nature of stock car racing as epitomized in “aggressive drivers” and “fast cars.” On the other hand, stock car racing is seen as “authentic” in nature. Since “working-class” “Southerners” did not have to deal with “searching for lost meanings,” it is possible to infer that working-class Southerners had a clearer understanding of themselves and their place in the world than other Americans. Thus, one can interpret the presumed historical relationship between stock car racing and the “South” as either representative of “primitiveness” (and thus ignorance) or as representative of “authenticity” and “realness.”

The special relationship between stock car racing and the “South” is emphasized through an association between stock car drivers in the 1940’s and moonshining, a phenomenon largely associated with the South. While most academic authors agree that this association is a myth, they argue that this myth helped bind

stock car racing to Southern culture or Southern values during its “initial” development in the late 1940’s (Howell 1997; Daniel 2000). Within the context of this myth, many early (NASCAR) stock car drivers are portrayed as beginning their “racing” careers as moonshiners. Moonshiners supposedly needed fast cars in order to outrun law enforcement. These cars supposedly helped teach future racecar drivers how to drive at high speeds. With the advent of organized stock car racing, they now had the ability to make money legitimately with less personal risk to themselves. In doing so they brought rural “Southern” values with them to the track. In turn, their presence at racetracks attracted working-class Southern fans who wanted to see athletes who were culturally similar to themselves.

The special relationship with the South is also emphasized through the early relationship between NASCAR and union activity. Through NASCAR’s history, Bill France, the founder of NASCAR and owner until 1972, encountered two attempts to unionize drivers. France’s behavior towards driver unionization efforts is seen as emblematic of his “Southern” values (Howell 1997, Pierce 2001). In 1961 and 1969, groups of NASCAR drivers attempted to unionize because of safety concerns and/or objections to certain NASCAR policies (Alderman et al. 2003). In both instances France ended unionization attempts by punishing drivers (e.g. taking away racing titles and cash prizes, banning drivers from competing, hiring replacement drivers, etc.) and using propaganda to cause a negative reaction among fans. A number of authors see France’s behavior as equivalent to union busting tactics employed by other businesses in the South (Howell 1997, Pierce 2001, Alderman et al. 2003).

Because of this similarity, it is assumed that NASCAR's (and thus early stock car racing) management style was a particularly "Southern" style of management.

Implied within the emphasis of the Southern character of stock car racing is a certain representation of what it means to be "Southern." This representation emphasizes the "culture" and "values" of white, working-class males while excluding other "Southern cultures." Non-white, female or "upper-class" fans or drivers are seen as aberrations that do not represent the historically "authentic" character of stock car racing and NASCAR (Pillsbury 1995 [1989]; Daniel 2000; Hurt 2005). This can be seen in Pillsbury's description of the supposedly "traditional" stock car racing fan. Pillsbury argues that:

[Stock]Car racing...has long been the spectator sport of the 'good old boys.' Richard Petty, Junior Johnson and Bill Elliot [popular NASCAR drivers of the late 1980's] are country boys with little formal schooling and obvious "aw shucks" origins. They represent the success of the disenfranchised good old boy against the system. These men have it all without college degrees, or Ralph Lauren Jeans or Perrier water. [Pillsbury 1995 (1989): 241]

By contrasting lifestyles of historically popular stock car drivers with that of people who have "college degrees, or Ralph Lauren Jeans or Perrier water," stereotypical features of an upperclass lifestyle, Pillsbury implies that these drivers epitomize working-class values. These "working-class" values are further emphasized through the use of the term "good old boys," a term that is stereotypically associated with "working-class," white, male "Southerners."

As noted earlier, much of the belief in the historical relationship between stock car racing and the "South" can be attributed to a conflation among academics between stock car racing and NASCAR. This is largely due to circular reasoning about NASCAR's relationship to stock car racing. Since NASCAR is the dominant

stock car racing organizer, it is assumed that the form of stock car racing represented in NASCAR's top division is the "true" form of stock car racing. Until the 1990's the majority of drivers in NASCAR's top division(s) (Grand National Pre-Winston Cup and Winston Cup) lived in the South and the majority of tracks that held top division races were based in the South (Pillsbury 1995 (1974); Pillsbury 1995 (1989); Alderman et al.; 2002; Hurt 2005). If NASCAR's top division represents the "true" form of stock car racing and the top division was historically concentrated in the South then stock car racing must have come into existence in the "South." Thus, it was inevitable that NASCAR became the dominant racing body since stock car racing began in the South and NASCAR is embedded with Southern values because it organizes stock car racing.

The idea that stock racing is a "Southern" tradition clearly dominates academics examinations of stock car racing. This is largely based on the assumption that the history of NASCAR represents the history of stock car racing. This has lead most academics examining stock car racing to believe there is a special cultural relationship between Southerners and stock car racing. By emphasizing this "special" relationship, academics portray stock car racing as historically representative of the "culture" and "values" of Southern, working-class white males.

CHAPTER 3

STOCK CAR RACING AND IMPLICIT THEORIES OF (“SOUTHERN”) TRADITION

By defining stock car racing as a “Southern” tradition, most academics examining stock car racing seem unaware of larger criticism of the “tradition” concept by historians and anthropologists. These academics do not explicitly explain how they define “tradition” and as a result do not engage with the wider theoretical debates about tradition among folklorists, anthropologists and historians. The implicit concepts of tradition used by academics examining NASCAR are similar to older ideas about tradition that have largely fell out of favor in anthropology.

Although most academics may agree that stock car racing was historically a “Southern” tradition, the older concepts of tradition that they employ differ based on their interpretation of NASCAR’s history. All geographers and historians examining stock car racing agree that in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s NASCAR began a dramatic geographic expansion beyond the South (Pillsbury 1995 [1989]; Howell 1997; Daniel 2000, Hurt 2005). They attribute this expansion to increased media exposure of NASCAR that began with national television contracts in the 1970’s. Their interpretation of this supposed expansion determines how they implicitly view the concept of tradition.

The various concepts of tradition that are employed by geographers and historians examining stock car racing are very similar to some older definitions of tradition outlined by Ben-Amos, a folklorist. In his article “The Seven Strands of Tradition,” Ben-Amos (1984) outlines various ideas that different folklorists and anthropologists have had about tradition. He argues that there have been primarily

seven ways in which folklorists or anthropologists have defined tradition. Of the concepts of tradition outlined by Ben-Amos, the ones that seem most applicable to academic examinations of stock car racing are the “tradition as culture” concept and the “tradition as mass” concept. For those using the “tradition as culture” concept, tradition represents folklore and practices that symbolize the identity of a given “culture.” For those using the “tradition as mass” concept, tradition represents a sort of superorganic force (i.e. a “mass”) embodied in specific folklore and practices that are passed down from generation to generation. Thus, in the “tradition as mass” view, tradition implicitly represents some metaphysical essence which exists within a given body of folklore or a given practice.

The tradition as culture perspective is representative of those authors who argue that the alleged geographic expansion of NASCAR represents a decline in the presence of Southern values in stock car racing. Pillsbury (1995 [1989]) was the main proponent of this position in the 1970’s and the late 1980’s. Pillsbury was the first academic to examine the relationship between NASCAR and the “South.” In a *Journal of Geography* article written in 1975 (reprinted 1995), Pillsbury argues that through NASCAR, stock car racing became a Southern phenomenon shortly after its initial development in the 1930’s and 1940’s. In the late 1960’s, NASCAR began to go through process of decentralization during which it began to slowly lose “its southern regional identity with the onslaught of national attention and interest...” (Pillsbury 1995 [1975]: 238).

In a later article written in 1989 (republished in 1995), Pillsbury argues that loss of “Southern” identity has continued (and accelerated) through the 1980’s

through increasing corporatization (i.e. increased emphasis on profit). Pillsbury predicts that this trend would lead to a decline in the “traditional” Southern audience of NASCAR events. In doing so, Northerner’s would appropriate stock car racing as their own national sport. However, “Southerners” might be able to retain stock car racing as a tradition by going to local short tracks (i.e. tracks less than a mile long) which better represented the “Southern roots” of stock car racing instead of going to top division NASCAR races at superspeedways (tracks 1 mile or more in length). Thus, while NASCAR (and thus stock car racing) would inevitably lose its “Southernness” at large superspeedways, Southerners might be able to locally retain stock car racing as a “Southern” tradition.

In contrast to Pillsbury, Hurt (2005) argues that since the late 1980’s, stock car racing has continued to maintain a Southern identity despite Pillsbury’s earlier predictions. Hurt contends that the migration of stock car racing outside the South has not proceeded as fast as Pillsbury thought. However, despite slower geographic expansion, the sport has recently begun to make major inroads among non-Southerners. Hurt contends that this will eventually lead to a decline in the number of “traditional” Southern fans and an eventual erasure of Southern identity in stock car racing. As a result, stock car racing will become a nationalized sport, a sport associated with a (generic) American identity instead of a specific regional identity.

Hurt (2005) contends that the beginnings of this eventual decline can be seen in the tensions between Southern fans and non-Southern fans. “Southern” fans have been critical of attempts by non-Southern fans to “erase” the “Southern history” of NASCAR’s (and by extension stock car racing’s) origins while many non-Southern

fans have disassociated NASCAR from the South and see attempts to define NASCAR as Southern as hostile to their involvement in fandom. This tension is seen as indicative of the changes that have already taken place in NASCAR and seen as a continuation of the gradual process of nationalization that began in the 1980's. Thus, while stock car racing has not ceased to be a "Southern tradition," it will eventually lose its "traditional" character and become associated with non-regional, American identity.

Both Pillsbury and Hurt's implicit understandings of tradition are similar to that of Dundes, a theorist who has employed a version of the "tradition as culture" perspective during the 1960's. Dundes (1965) in attempting to define folklore argues that one could describe groups called "folk" and in so doing implicitly provide a definition for tradition. Dundes argues that:

The term "folk" can refer to *any group of people whatsoever* [emphasis in original text] who share at least one common factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is—it could be a common occupation, language, or religion—but what is important is that a group formed for whatever reason will have some *traditions* [emphasis added] which it calls its own... A member of the group may not know all other members, but he will probably know the common core of traditions which help the group have a sense of group identity. (Dundes 1965: 2)

The implication of Dundes' definition of "folk" is that practices (or customs, a term he uses to describe the shared practices of group) are traditions if they are shared by members of a defined group of people and in turn, represent that group's identity.

By arguing that the "tradition" of stock car racing will cease to be a "tradition" as fans outside of the South expropriate it to represent their own identity, Pillsbury (1995 [1974]; 1995 [1989]) and Hurt (2005) are arguing that stock car racing was a tradition because it represented the shared "culture" of "Southern", "working-

class” whites. Like Dundes, they are implicitly arguing that traditions are shared practices of a given group of people. This seems to indicate that Pillsbury and Hurt do not believe that a practice labeled as a “tradition” can retain the cultural values that it represents when it is expropriated by others. Instead, it is inevitable that these practices will cease to be traditions.

In contrast to the views of both Pillsbury and Hurt, the “tradition as mass” perspective is implicitly emphasized by those who hold a “transcultural” view of the geographic expansion of NASCAR. In other words they argue that while NASCAR has become “nationalized” through fans outside of the South, it retains many aspects of its “Southern” origins. Geographers Alderman et al. (2003) argue that Southern values have not declined through NASCAR’s expansion. While the fan base of NASCAR has increased to include women, non-Southerners and the college educated, the expansion can be seen as a way through which “Southern” values and American values have influenced each other.

For Alderman et al., the “South” has continued to be a way through which fans both inside the “South” and outside the “South” understand stock car racing. The relationship between NASCAR and the “South” can still be seen in terms of strategically used corporate promotion and the attitudes of NASCAR management towards unions. At the same time, stereotypes about the South and the practices of some fans (particularly in relation to displays of the Confederate flag) have prevented people with non-white “Southern” identities from influencing or participating in NASCAR (as a fan or as a driver). They speculate that the spread of NASCAR may represent “that the South is increasingly defining the nation’s values and attitudes

(2003: 247).” Thus, for Alderman et al. stock car racing can be both a “Southern tradition” since continuities still exist between NASCAR and the “South” while at the same time non-Southerners can be fans.

Their implicit understanding of tradition is similar to the ideas of Shils, one of the theorists who seems to argue from the” tradition as mass perspective.” Shils (1981) argues that tradition “is anything which is transmitted or handed down from the past to the present (Shils 1981: 12).” Aspects of these “traditions” can change over time but they retain “normative elements.” These normative elements represent what one could colloquially term “values” in that they represent the acceptance of a given “tradition” as the way things are done. For Shils, these “normative elements” of a tradition represents the essential characteristics of that tradition, which are passed down from generation to generation. Like the “Southern values” that Alderman et al. believe to be part of stock car racing, these normative elements can not be separated from a tradition. If a tradition loses these normative elements then it inevitably ceases to be a tradition.

By arguing that Southern values have migrated with stock car racing as it has spread beyond the South, Alderman et al. are defining values in similar terms to the normative elements of Shils. If NASCAR represents “that the South is increasingly defining the nation’s values and attitudes (Alderman et al.: 2003: 247)” then these values appear to represent “the way things are done.” Values in this sense would represent metaphysical features of stock car racing that help perpetuate stock car racing’s existence. Like Shils idea of normative elements, stock car racing would cease to be a “Southern tradition” if it lost its “Southern values.”

Understandings of traditions employed by academics examining NASCAR seem to be based on two underlying assumptions. These assumptions are generally shared by those employing older definitions of tradition. First, both of these definitions of tradition assume some form of continuity between the past and the present. What a given concept of tradition represents must have existed over a long period of time in order for it to be considered a tradition. Thus, the “authenticity” of a given form of “folklore,” practice, or knowledge (or form of transmission in the case of the tradition as process perspective) as a tradition is dependent on the element of time. Theorists examining tradition have had varying views on what constitutes the “correct” amount of time a given form of tradition needs to have existed in order for it to be authentic. Some such as Gross (1994) have described a specific unit of time that is needed for a tradition to be authentic (in Gross’s case three generations). Others such as Shils (1981) have been less specific and vaguely argue that traditions do not exist for short periods of time but must exist for long periods of time.

Second, most of the earlier understandings of tradition assume that whatever constitutes a tradition contains some form of stable elements. For example, in the Tradition as Culture formulation, it is assumed that the people retain the same identity over a period of time while in the Tradition as Mass formulation, the superorganic force or “mass” that underlies tradition remains stable over time. Thus, while some aspects of a particular “tradition” may change overtime, there are certain aspects of a tradition that if changed, will cause it to cease to be a tradition.

It should be clear from this chapter that the implicit concepts of tradition used by academics examining NASCAR are similar to older ideas about tradition that have

largely fell out of favor in anthropology. The implicit use of the tradition as culture perspective is representative of those authors who argue that the alleged geographic expansion of NASCAR (in the 1980's) represents a decline in the presence of Southern values in stock car racing. The implicit use of the "tradition as mass" perspective is representative of those who hold a "transcultural" view of the geographic expansion of NASCAR. Despite the disagreement between these two perspectives, proponents of both perspectives assume that there is some form of continuity between stockcar racing's past and present and they assume that there were some elements of stock car racing have historically remained stable.

CHAPTER 4

INVENTED AND CONTEXTUAL TRADITION AS A CRITIQUE OF THE “SOUTHERN TRADITION” OF STOCK CAR RACING

Despite the fact that geographers and historians examining stock car racing employ implicit conceptualizations of tradition similar to those of other theorists, they neglect various perspectives that have critiqued these earlier ideas about tradition. One of the main critiques of earlier ideas of tradition was the “invention of tradition” perspective originally developed by Hobsbawm (1983) in history and, Handler and Linnekin (1984) in anthropology. By using a modified version of the “invention of tradition” perspective, one should be able to see the problems inherent in academic examinations of stock car racing.

The “invention of tradition” perspective is primarily a critique of the supposed time depth and stability of a given “tradition.” There have been primarily two major ways in which the “invention of tradition” perspective has manifested itself among historians and anthropologists. Historians have primarily used the first version of the perspective developed by Hobsbawm (1983). Most historians and anthropologists believe Hobsbawm and Ranger’s The Invention of Tradition (1983) was the first work in which the terms “invention of tradition” or “invented tradition” were used. In the introduction of this book, Hobsbawm (1983) outlines the definition of “invented tradition” that was used by most historians in the book. Hobsbawm uses the “invention of tradition” perspective to argue that not all practices which have been labeled traditions (by both academics and the people supposedly practicing traditions) are in fact “real” traditions. In defining “invented traditions,” he argues that there is a distinction between “traditions,” “customs” and in turn “invented traditions.” Both

“traditions” and “customs” are practices that are symbolically significant to a group of people. “Traditions” and “customs” are distinguished from one another based upon their capacity to change. He contends that “traditions” are invariant practices that have “deep” historical roots (i.e. long-term continuity with the distant past) while “customs” are malleable practices that have variable time depth. Thus, for Hobsbawm the key distinction between “tradition” and “custom” is the ability of a symbolically significant practice to change.

In elaborating the definitions of “tradition,” “custom” and “invented tradition,” Hobsbawm implies that a specific practice can only be seen as an “invented tradition” if three criteria are met. First, practices labeled, as “invented traditions” must be unchanging after their inception. As Hobsbawm states: “The object and characteristic of ‘traditions’, including invented ones, is invariance. The past, real or invented, to which they refer imposes fixed (normally formalized) practices, such as repetition” (Hobsbawm 1983: 2). This means that for Hobsbawm, “invented traditions” must be different from “customs” because of their invariance.

Second, like “traditions” or “customs,” “invented traditions” must be practices that have some sort of symbolic meaning. Later in his introduction, Hobsbawm (1983) argues that practices which are perceived as purely practical can be distinguished from those that have symbolic significance. For example, he argues that the wearing of hard motorcycle helmets or military helmets is practical because hard material provides protection. Thus, we can not say that wearing motorcycle helmets or military helmets is a “tradition,” “custom” or “invented tradition.” However, if a certain style of motorcycle helmet or military helmet were to gain

symbolic significance then the practice of wearing that helmet could be described as a “tradition,” “custom” or “invented tradition” (depending upon time depth and its ability to change.). This means that even if a practice is believed to have “deep” historical roots and be invariant over time, that practice can not be defined as a “tradition” or “invented tradition.”

Finally, (most importantly for Hobsbawm) practices labeled as “invented traditions” must have “shallow” historical roots but people must believe that these practices have a connection to the “deep” historical past. Hobsbawm argues that “invented traditions” are:

a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour (sic) by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with the past.... In short, they are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition. (Hobsbawm 1983: 2-3)

In other words, through repetition and their symbolic content “invented traditions” create the illusion that they have a long continuity with some time in the past. Thus, what primarily differentiates an invented tradition from a “real” tradition is the length of time it has been in existence.

This understanding of the “invention of tradition” perspective implies that if stock car racing were to meet certain criteria outlined by Hobsbawm then one could determine whether or not stock car racing could be defined as a “real” tradition or an “invented tradition.” This would allow one to evaluate the claim by academics such as Pillsbury, Hurt and Alderman et al., that stockcar racing is a “Southern” tradition. If stock car racing met Hobsbawm’s criteria for a “real tradition” then those

academics perpetuation this “Southern” tradition claim might be correct. If stock car racing met Hobsbawm’s criteria for an “invented tradition” then those perpetuating this “Southern” tradition claim would be implicated in the “invention” process.

However, there are three problems with the Hobsbawmian version of “invention of tradition” that preclude its application to stock car racing. First, Hobsbawm vaguely defines the difference between traditions and “invented” traditions. It is unclear if stock car racing would qualify as a “real” tradition since it could only have existed since the invention of the automobile. If time depth is one of the key factors in determining whether or not a practice is a tradition or “invented tradition” then how much time depth must a “real” tradition have? If an “invariant” practice has existed for two centuries, is it a tradition or an “invented tradition”? What about three centuries? Four? Five? Since time depth is defined in vague terms, those using the “invention of tradition” perspective can arbitrarily define what practices are “invented traditions” and which practices are not. This could lead to potential inconsistent uses of the term.

This is a problem that is not unique to Hobsbawm’s understanding of tradition. As noted earlier, a number of theorists of tradition have vaguely defined the long period of time for which something (i.e. lore, a practice, a performance style, etc.) has to exist before it can be labeled a tradition. Shils for example vaguely defines what period of time is needed for “something that is passed on” to exist before it can be labeled a tradition. He argues that one can distinguish fashions from traditions based on time depth (short time depth for fashions and long time depth for traditions).

However, he paradoxically argues that the distinction between what is a tradition and what is not a tradition is vague but that the distinction does actually exist.

Second, the definition of “real” traditions used by Hobsbawm is problematic. By defining “traditions” as invariant, symbolic, practices, Hobsbawm problematically implies that some societies have a stable, bounded, “culture.” In doing so he assumes that “traditions” will be shared by all individuals in a culture. As Roseberry (1989) has argued culture is always in flux. People are continuously confronted by new circumstances that do not fit their previous experiences. When confronting these new circumstances they attempt to apply their current cultural beliefs to these circumstances. However, in attempting to confront these new circumstances peoples’ cultural beliefs are “stretched” (i.e. unconsciously altered) and new meanings develop. However, these circumstances and beliefs differ based upon a person’s position in a given society. Whether someone is rich, poor, a man, a woman, etc. will affect what his or her experience of culture will be and the ways that his or her beliefs will change (Roseberry 1989). Thus, while some practices may have continuities with the past, the symbolic meanings of these practices will change over time as the cultural context of these practices changes and there will be multiple meanings associated with these practices among different groups in a given society.

Finally, Hobsbawm (1983) problematically argues that one can separate practices into “traditions,” “customs” and “invented traditions” which have symbolic meaning and “practical” practices. One cannot separate symbolic meaning from any form of human practice. Hobsbawm’s example of the motorcycle helmet illustrates this problem. Even though a motorcycle helmet may be “practical,” the choice to

wear a motorcycle helmet is not solely based on the helmet's utility. For some the lack of a motorcycle helmet could symbolically project an image of strength while wearing a helmet might project an image of weakness. For others the motorcycle helmet might metaphorically affect their "freedom" on the road. In these hypothetical cases, a person would decide or not decide to wear a motorcycle helmet based upon the symbolism of the helmet.

The various problems with Hobsbawm's understanding of "invention of tradition" make his perspective inapplicable to stock car racing. Hobsbawm's understanding of "invention of tradition" indicates that it might be impossible to ever define what represents a "real" tradition. As noted earlier, the older ideas about tradition used those academics examining stock car racing share two premises: long term continuity and some "stable" elements. Hobsbawm definition of "real" tradition seems to be based on these premises. Since Hobsbawm cannot clearly define the depth necessary for a tradition to be "real" and symbolic practices are never "stable", it is implied that no practice could be clearly defined by Hobsbawm's criteria as a "real" traditions. This would indicate that one would never be able to know whether or not stock car racing is actually "Southern" tradition or an "invented tradition."

The second version of the "invention of tradition" perspective as originally developed by anthropologists Handler and Linnekin deals with many of the problematic aspects of Hobsbawm's perspective. Unlike Hobsbawm, Handler and Linnekin (1984) define "invented traditions" in much broader terms. In their seminal article, "Tradition, Genuine or Spurious," Handler and Linnekin (1984) argue against what they term the "naturalistic conception of tradition" (Handler and Linnekin 1984:

274). According to them, the “naturalistic understanding of tradition” argues that “traditions” are practices that have some sort of essential characteristics that do not change over time. This presupposes that there is continuity between practices that occur in the present and practices that occur in the past. As noted earlier, understandings of stock car racing as a “Southern” tradition presuppose some sort of continuity with the past whether this continuity be related to continuity with “Southern culture” or “Southern values.”

For Handler and Linnekin, this continuity is a social construction of the present which projects present practices into the past. They argue that all “traditions” are “invented traditions.” Traditions are invented because “tradition is a mode of the past, and is inseparable from the present” (Handler and Linnekin 1984: 276). In other words, tradition is a process through which people connect the present to the past. When people label a practice as a “tradition,” they are attempting to make some sort of connection between the past and the present (Handler and Linnekin 1984). Thus, Handler and Linnekin are implicitly arguing that a practice is only a “tradition” if a group of people label it a “tradition.” One can not separate “tradition” from the people who are engaged in these practices.

Handler (1988) expanded upon the anthropological definition of “invented tradition” in his examination of Quebecois nationalism, Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec. Handler argued that practices became traditions through a process of “cultural objectification.” “Cultural objectification” is a process through which certain practices associated with a nation or ethnic group are portrayed as fixed, immutable entities (i.e. portrayed as “traditions”). Members of the group

believe that these practices symbolically represent and preserve ethnic or national cohesion and boundaries. Paradoxically, by portraying these practices as fixed and separate entities, “traditions” are symbolically separated from the wider cultural context. Through this separation from the wider cultural context, these practices have the potential to undermine the identity of the group (Handler 1988). If these “traditions” are seen as separate from everyday social contexts, then people could view the “traditions” of their group as an assortment of randomly disconnected practices.

Handler and Linnekin’s perspective seems more applicable to stock car racing. Handler and Linnekin are able to avoid the problems of Hobsbawm’s version of the “invention of tradition” perspective by rejecting the idea that there is an “objective” understanding of tradition. First, if all practices labeled traditions are not “real,” then one does not have to worry whether or not a practice has enough time depth to be a “real” tradition nor does one portray practices as associated with bounded cultural entities. Second, they do not make a distinction between practical practices and those labeled as tradition. In doing so, they do not presuppose that some practices lack symbolic meaning.

One possible objection to Handler and Linnekin’s understanding of the “invention of tradition” is that it does not allow for continuity in practices. For example, one could argue that baseball (which is often times labeled as an “American tradition”) has retained some key elements in its rules (e.g. bases, “three strikes your out,” etc.) during its entire history as a practice. Some later authors employing this perspective (Vlastos 1997; Babadzan 2000), have been able to deal with this problem

by arguing that although a practice may exhibit continuities with the past, the context in which a given practice exists is continually changing. Thus, even though all elements of practice may be the same, the symbolic meaning of that practice must change as it confronts different political, economic and historical circumstances.

This continuity and change can be seen in stock car racing. While some elements of stock car racing have remained the same overtime (e.g. oval tracks, laps and the red, yellow, green and checkered flags), major symbolic aspects of stock car racing have changed over time. The most obvious example of this is the changing definition of stock car racing. As noted earlier, the term stock car was originally symbolic of standard, unmodified cars which happened to be used for autoracing. Eventually stock car symbolically changed to represent modified autoracing cars which happened to have bodies which looked like standard cars. Thus, while certain aspects of stock car racing remained fixed, what constituted stock car racing symbolically changed through time.

If applied to stock car racing, Handler and Linnekin's perspective would imply that the "Southern tradition" of stock car racing represents an instance of cultural objectification. If stock car racing is a "Southern tradition" directly linked to NASCAR, then the period before the 1980's should represent a period of "pure" continuity during which NASCAR was stable and unchanging. This is clearly not the case since NASCAR experienced numerous changes during this period including attempts at unionization, changes in sponsorship, changes in car design, changes in race track locations, the building of superspeedways, etc (Howell 1997, Wright 2002). Even while there may have been some continuities in stock car racing the

changing context of stock car racing would lead to changes in meaning. Thus, even if stock car racing was associated with Southern identity at some point in the past, the symbolic understanding of what “Southern identity,” “Southern values” or “the South” represents would be in constant flux.

As Roseberry (1989) has noted the experience of someone growing up as a white “Southerner” during the 1940’s would be different from someone growing up as a Southerner in the 1950’s and in the 1960’s, etc and from someone in a different social position (i.e. class, race, etc.). Various historical circumstances such as controversies over segregation would continually alter what it meant to be Southern for different groups of people. Thus, by arguing that stock car racing is a “Southern” tradition, geographers and historians in effect ignore these larger changes in Southern identity and assume a fixed, stable relationship between stock car racing and “the South.”

Some critics of the “invention of tradition” perspective have argued that this perspective is problematic in that the use of the word “invention” implies that the labeling of certain practices as “traditions” is a process of deliberate fabrication or creation (Friedman 1992; Spear 2003). In this formulation, those people who represent themselves as practicing certain traditions would at best be unwitting dupes or at worst be maliciously using the idea of tradition for personal gain (e.g. purposely performing a “traditional” German dance for tourists for financial gain). This is not an entirely academic discussion since works of anthropologists using a perspective similar to that of Handler’s have been drawn into debates over the authenticity of specific traditions. For example, in 1989, Alan Hanson published “Making of the

Maori: culture invention and its logic” in the American Anthropologist. In this article Hanson argued that the “Maori traditions” articulated by contemporary Maori nationalists were largely a product of social scientists who had examined the Maori in the early 20th century. As a result of publishing this article, Hanson’s views became part of the debate over Maori rights in New Zealand (Levine 1991). Hanson was extensively critiqued by Maori scholars who questioned his motives and the logic of his scholarly claims (Linnekin 1991, Levine 1991). As a result, Maoris interpreted Hanson’s use of the term invented as synonym for fabrication.

Typical responses to critiques of “invention” as “fabrication” can be seen in Hanson’s response to his critics. In his response, Hanson argued that: “Those who want to promote a “new” way of thinking about “culture” and “tradition” use the word *invention* not because it has a technical meaning all scholars presumably know, but as rhetorical device intended to stimulate curiosity and interest among potential readers (Hanson 1991: 450).” Thus, for Hanson “invention” did not connote “fabrication” or purposeful construction but instead represents a different way of understanding the nature of tradition. For Hanson, at least, it was not meant to be a technical way to describe the process through which “traditions” were created.

Further complicating this issue is the use of “invented tradition” as a form of deliberate fabrication or creation by some historians employing the concept. A number of the “invented traditions” described in Hobsbawm’s and Ranger’s The Invention of Tradition are the result of deliberate fabrication. For example, in describing the “invented Highland tradition” of Scotland, Trever-Roper (1983) describes the forgery of an “authentic Highland Scottish” ballad by James

MacPherson and John MacPherson (unrelated) in 1738. He contends that until the forgery of MacPherson and MacPherson was discredited in 1805, a number of people in Scotland believed that the MacPherson's ballad was proof of a "Scottish" literary tradition because they wanted to differentiate Highland Scots from the Irish. In other words, these people were tricked into adopting certain ballads as Scottish "traditions."

Others such as Howard (2003) have argued that while some "invented traditions" may be deliberately created, those who adopt a deliberately created tradition are not necessarily tricked into adopting these "traditions" but instead may adopt invented tradition to fill certain social needs in a given context. Using the example of the double ring wedding ceremony (i.e. male and female wedding rings exchanged at weddings), Howard argues that while the double ring wedding ceremony was the deliberate creation of jewelry companies in the 1940's and 1950's, this ceremony fulfilled certain cultural needs in the post-War United States. Wedding bands for men had appeared earlier in the 1920's. They were not adopted until the 1940's and 1950's primarily due to the Great Depression. During the great Depression many couples were unable to get married or put off marriage for economic reasons. When the post-war economic boom occurred many men wanted a way to show that they were married and that they had "made it" economically. The male wedding band provided a way through which they could symbolically show that they were married and living a proper lifestyle. Thus, even though the double ring ceremony was the creation of specific corporations, people adopted this "tradition" not because they were tricked but because it fulfilled a culturally specific need in a specific historical context.

The idea that “invention” represents fabrication would imply that geographers and historians examining stock car racing were consciously attempting to dupe readers or other academics into associating stock car racing with the South. It is doubtful that this is the case. Academic examinations of stock car racing have been published in peer reviewed journals and by university presses. It is doubtful that these organizations would accept journal articles or manuscripts that were purposely fraudulent. Because of this, it seems likely that academics understandings of stock car racing are products of a given author’s specific historical, geographic and cultural circumstances instead of fraud or deception.

As a proposed solution to the problem of “invention” being confused with fabrication, Spear (2003), a historian, has proposed that instead of using the term “invented tradition,” we should use the term “neo-tradition” to describe “traditions” that were created or that have “shallow” time depth. However, this solution does not seem adequate for two reasons. First, it replicates the problems of the Hobsbawmian approach to “invention of tradition” by implicitly differentiating between “real” traditions and neo-traditions. Second, it does not allow one to distinguish between practices that were deliberately created to be “traditions” and those practices which became labeled as “traditions” through specific cultural and historical circumstances.

A possible way out of this problem is the creation of a term which differentiates between practices which were deliberately created to be “traditions” through fabrication or purposeful creation and those practices labeled “traditions” because of specific cultural and historical circumstances. I would argue that the best way to do this would be to label fabricated or created “traditions” as “invented

traditions” and label practices which were labeled “traditions” because of historical and cultural circumstances as “contextual traditions.” The use of the term “contextual traditions” allows one to use the analytical strengths of the “invention of tradition” perspective without implying that those who label a practice as “traditional” are unwitting dupes or are have negative ulterior motives. “Contextual” implies that a practice labeled as “tradition” is the product of specific cultural and historical circumstances in the present. Thus, like Handler and Linnekin’s understanding of “invention of tradition,” “invented” and “contextual” traditions would be part of the process through which people connect the present to the past. They would only differ based upon how a given practice was connected to the past.

By applying the idea of “contextual tradition” to academic examinations of stock car racing, one can see that their understandings of “tradition” are problematic. Both the “tradition as mass” and “tradition as culture perspectives” imply some sort of symbolic continuity in practice for at least some period of time. As the proposed “contextual” tradition perspective shows, this continuity is an illusion that is a product of present cultural and historical circumstances. The stable continuity of tradition that is assumed in all versions by geographers and historians examining stock car racing did not exist in stock car racing or in NASCAR. The “Southern” values that Alderman et al. (2002) believe to be embedded in stock car racing cannot have remained stable across all forms of stock car racing since each individual track has experienced different, cultural historical and geographical circumstances. Before the 1980’s, the stability of the relationship between “Southern” culture and stock car racing that is proposed by Pillsbury (1995 [1975] and 1995 [1989]) and Hurt (2005),

could not have existed since symbols associated with stock car racing and “Southern culture” were in constant flux. Thus, by defining stock car racing as a “Southern” tradition, academics examining stock car racing are more likely making claims about their own personal understandings of the present state of NASCAR instead of describing the “real” relationship between the history of stock car racing and the present.

CHAPTER 5

THE COMPLEXITY OF NASCAR'S HISTORY

Even if one were to assume that “traditions” exist one could not say that stock car racing is a “Southern tradition.” The historical relationship between stock car racing and the “South” is much more complex than that posited by those geographers and historians examining stock car racing. First, the argument that there is a special cultural relationship between white, “working-class” “Southerners” and automobiles is problematic. Historically, people of all races and classes in the United States have had special cultural associations with automobiles. For example, Gilroy (2001) has noted that there is a complex historical relationship between automobiles and blacks in the United States. Gilroy argues that during the 1950's and 1960's cars were seen by many blacks as a symbol of liberation. By owning a car one was not only saying that one had gained socioeconomic status but also that one had gained freedom of movement that one had not had in the past. This eventually morphed into the current use of the automobile as a representation of wealth through the ethnic car markets which emphasize car modifications such as expensive sound systems.

If the car became a symbol of freedom for many blacks then by the logic of academics examining stock car racing, there should theoretically be more black fans and/or stock car drivers. Ironically, Daniel (2000) who argues that “[white] Southerner's manifested an inordinate interest in automobiles” provides evidence that the limited black presence in stock car racing was due to economic and not cultural factors. There do not seem to be any corporate restrictions (restrictions at tracks or from race organizing bodies) that prevented black drivers from participating in stock

car racing. For example, NASCAR did not actively prevent black drivers from racing. Instead, the ability of black stock car drivers to be involved in NASCAR was dependent on their ability to receive financial support. Wendell Scott, the only black driver to win a NASCAR top division championship, actively raced through the 1960's and 1970's (Daniel 2000). During this time period he was unable to gain a sponsorship deal and he often times had to borrow parts from fellow drivers. While his lack of financial support may have been due to racism, there were no special characteristics of stock car racing that prevented Scott from racing or being interested in the sport.

The case of African-American stock car drivers seems to indicate that stock car racing was not naturally associated with the Southern white, "working-class." Instead, in some instances, the cultural association between stock car racing and certain groups of people was more likely due to economic issues related to racism on the part of corporate sponsors and segregation of economic spaces in the South (i.e. the inability of potential black fans to attend races). This would seem to indicate that economic factors were more important for the involvement of certain groups in stock car racing than some objective association between stock car racing and "Southern values."

Second, the emphasis on stock car racing's Southern origins ignores areas outside of the South where stock car racing and in some cases NASCAR was present. There are a number of stock car racing tracks outside of the "South" which have continuously held stock car races since the period of time before stock car racing supposedly spread beyond the South. These include Columbus Speedway in

Columbus, OH since 1950 (www.columbusspeedway.com), the Waterford Speedbowl in Waterford, CT since 1951 (www.speedbowl.com), the Wall Township Speedway in Wall Township, NJ since 1952 (www.wallspeedway.com), Thompson International Speedway in Thompson, CT since 1951 (www.thompsonspeedway.com), Jennerstown Speedway in Jennerstown, PA since 1953, Stafford Motor Speedway in Stafford Springs, CT since 1959 (staffordmotorspeedway.com) and Cajon Speedway in El Cajon, CA since 1961 (www.cajonspeedway.com). It should be noted that most of the tracks listed above began racing stock cars within a relatively short period of time after the founding of NASCAR (1947). While it is true that all of these tracks are now associated with NASCAR, this was not always the case. Many of these tracks had stock car races before becoming NASCAR affiliates or having NASCAR races. If stock car racing is historically a “Southern tradition,” then these tracks should not have had the continuous presence of stock car racing events through the 1950’s and early 1960’s. Had stock car racing actually been a “Southern tradition” then these tracks should have either gone out of business or stopped running stock car races.

Even if one were to assume that the history of NASCAR is the same as the history of stock car racing, one would account for the historical presence of NASCAR outside the South. As Wright (2002) has noted, the early distribution of NASCAR tracks and was not completely Southern focused. In the late 1940’s and early 1950’s, a large percentage of NASCAR tracks were located outside of the “South.” For example, in 1950, over fifty percent of top division NASCAR races were held outside the South. While there was a decline in the number of “non-Southern” tracks during

the mid-1950's to late 1960's, with the exception of 1962, at least one top division race was held at tracks outside of the South. The most consistently used "non-Southern" tracks were located in California, a long distance from the "South."

For Wright, the decline in "non-Southern" tracks in the 1950's and 1960's was more likely due to the decisions of Bill France than a special relationship between the "South" and NASCAR. Before founding NASCAR France had been heavily involved in beach racing in Daytona Beach, Florida. For a number of years France had wanted to build a "superspeedway" (a track 2 miles long) in Daytona. In 1959 he was able to do so with the opening of Daytona International Speedway. Since France needed to fill Daytona with fans during races, he focused on the "South" since Southern fans were more likely to be able to drive to Daytona than fans outside of the "South" (Wright 2002). Thus, the presumed relationship between NASCAR and the "South" was not because of values embedded in NASCAR but because of the business policies of Bill France.

The geographic spread of stock car racing and NASCAR beyond the South indicates that there had to be a continuous presence of fans beyond the South. Stock car racing is not only a form of sport or entertainment but it is also a business. Racetracks and racing organizing bodies need to continuously attract spectators to their races in order to remain financially stable. It seems unlikely that tracks would continue to run stock car races or that Bill France would have continued to run races outside the South if there were not enough spectators to attend these races. This implies that outside of the South, it is likely that there were some people who

considered themselves fans of stock car racing before 1980's (the alleged spread of stock car racing "beyond the South").

As noted earlier, many academics conflate the history of NASCAR with that of stock car racing. Wright's (2002) contention that the historical decision to orient NASCAR to the South was more due to economic factors related to the Daytona "superspeedway" seems to be the most likely explanation for the association between stock car racing and the South. Bill France, the founder of NASCAR, was originally born in Washington D.C. so for part of his life, he did not necessarily have "cultural" links with the South (Wright 2002). As most academics and popular historians acknowledge, France had complete control over all levels of the operation of NASCAR (Howell 1997, Pierce 2001, MacGregor 2005). If this is the case, then the decisions to hold certain races in certain geographic areas were not necessarily based upon any objective link between "Southern" culture and stock car racing. Instead, it seems likely that France's personal preferences and economic beliefs would be the most important factors determining where NASCAR located races. In effect, France could decide which people had possible access to NASCAR races. By briefly orienting NASCAR towards a Southern audience, France may have inadvertently created the association between stock cars and the "South."

CHAPTER 6

STOCK CAR RACING AND THE “SOUTH” OUTSIDE OF THE ACADEMY

If stock car racing is a “contextual tradition” of the South and the history of stock car racing is more complex than that posited by academics, why do academics view stock car racing as historically “Southern?” It is possible that this is related to wider cultural associations between “the South” and stock car racing. The belief that NASCAR is (or was) a “Southern” tradition is not limited to academic circles.

Many people other than academics believe that there is some sort of cultural relationship between NASCAR and the South. This can most recently be seen in the discussion of “NASCAR dad’s” during the 2004 Presidential campaign and in some “popular” books about NASCAR. While most of the discussion of “NASCAR dads” in the popular press largely focused on the supposed relationship between (male) NASCAR fans and “conservative” political values, some used this discussion as a way to describe the influence that “Southern values” had on national politics. The category of NASCAR dads was created by a Democratic pollster in order to describe individuals within the rural South (Finney 2004; Wehde 2004). For reporters, this category became an important way to describe all rural voters. NASCAR fans (or most “loyal” NASCAR fans) were portrayed as blue-collar or lower middle class, white, males who were largely conservative in their political views (Ryan 2003 ;Stearns 2003).

Implied within some of this discussion was the view that conservative political values and “Southern” values were the same. Since in some cases NASCAR fans were portrayed as one largely homogenous block (Finney 2004; Wehde 2004),

some reporters made it appear as though all NASCAR fans shared these “Southern” values (even if they did not necessarily reside within “the South”). Thus, for some, NASCAR became a symbol of the importance of “the [white, male] South” (and/or the influence of “the South” in other regions of the United States) during the 2004 presidential campaigns.

During the presidential campaigns of 2004, the idea that NASCAR represented “conservative, Southern, white males” was used by both parties. Some Republicans such as Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee used NASCAR as a way to argue that the Democratic Party was “out of touch” with (male) “Southerners. Huckabee stated at a Sportsmen for Bush announcement that John Edwards, the vice-presidential candidate and former Senator of North Carolina, “was out of touch with the South because he [was] not an avid hunter, *a huge fan of NASCAR* [emphasis added] or interested in farming (Brummett 2004).” In contrast, some Democrats saw NASCAR as way to reach out to “Southern” (white male) culture in order to gain more votes. Dave “Mudcat” Saunders, a strategist for Bob Graham’s failed presidential bid, convinced Graham to sponsor stock cars at several NASCAR races as a way to “move through” “Southern culture (Jonson 2003).”

Politics is not the only arena in which people have articulated an association between NASCAR and “the South.” A number of “popular books” about NASCAR argue that NASCAR is implicitly associated with the “South.” The most recent of these is Jeff MacGregor’s Sunday Money (2005). MacGergor’s book is a pseudoethnographic account of his observations about NASCAR fans. MacGregor, a journalist/author, had limited contact with stock car racing before writing his book

and a limited knowledge of NASCAR. In order to write the book, he rented a camper and traveled with his wife to every Winston Cup Race that was held during the 2002 Winston Cup Season. MacGregor structures the book in chronological order describing his experiences at the different tracks and the encounters that he has with fans and track personnel. Some races such as the Daytona 500 receive extensive coverage while others such as the second New Hampshire International Speedway Race and one of the Michigan races receive only brief mention in a paragraph. Interspersed in between these accounts is information about the history of NASCAR and general information such as television audience figures.

MacGregor argues that stock car racing was originally a “tradition of the South” until NASCAR began promoting it in other geographic areas. He contends that “[stock car racing] did not explode into broad public consciousness (read: Northern) [parentheses in the original] until the last 5 years or so [approximately 2000] (MacGregor 2005: 224-225).” Since the supposed “broad public consciousness” of stock car racing is relatively recent, MacGregor implies that “Southern values” are still extremely influential among stock car racing (or NASCAR) fans.

The various encounters with NASCAR fans described by MacGregor generally fit into popular stereotypes about Southerners and almost all of them take place at Southern tracks. These include describing fans in Daytona who yelled at his wife “show your tits,” noting that a track owner once described Dale Earnhart, a now deceased Winston Cup driver, as the “reincarnation of the Confederate soldier, describing the races at Talladega Motorspeedway as a “redneck woodstock,” noting

two fans wearing t-shirts which read “It’s a Bubba thing: you wouldn’t understand” and “It’s a Southern thing: you wouldn’t understand” (also bearing a confederate flag), being approached by Evangelical Christians at one race, describing how gossip about cheating NASCAR drivers could be used to gain publicity (“Which married hotshoe maintains a second motorhome as his at-track love nest?”) and describing racist fans talking about beating up blacks. These examples are punctuated by brief comments about the spread of “Southern values,” particularly in relation to discussions of race and gender. For example, when describing race issues in NASCAR, MacGregor states:

Paradoxically, just as the northern African American middle class is returning to Atlanta and the New South in great numbers, a Great Migration in reverse, NASCAR is busy exporting the traditional comforts of its Old South medicine show north and east and west. Welcome to NASCAR! (MacGregor 2005: 325)

This statement implies that some aspects of NASCAR still represent “older Southern values” despite the fact that NASCAR has gained a wider “non-Southern” audience.

The examples of “NASCAR Dads” and MacGregor’s book show that for some Americans, NASCAR is culturally associated with the “South.” If there were not larger cultural associations among Americans or “Southerners” between NASCAR and the “South,” it seems unlikely that members of both political parties would have used NASCAR as a symbolic component of their campaigns or that MacGregor would focus much of his book on Southern fans while glossing over the experiences of non-Southerners. This shows that the academic idea that stock car racing is a “Southern” tradition does not exist in a vacuum. Academics could have been influenced by wider media which perpetuates the stereotypical, historical association between stock car racing and the “South” or they could be “Southern”

fans themselves who feel some kinship with the idea of the “good old boy” (Most academic articles about NASCAR have been written by people at “Southern” universities and/or in journals geographically focused on the “South.” However, it is unclear whether or not these authors are originally from the “South” or consider themselves to be “Southerners”).

CHAPTER 7

CASE STUDY: PURPOSE AND METHODS

The Purpose of the Case Study

If as argued above, stock car racing is a contextual tradition and there is a history of stock car racing outside of the “South,” how do people outside of the South relate to the local history of stock car racing? From May 2005 to September 2005, I was engaged in ethnographic research at City Speedway (a pseudonymously named racetrack in the Midwest) that sought answers to this question. Through this research, I wanted to examine the relationship between the local history of stock car racing, how a “local” track portrayed stock car racing and how “local” fans understood stock car racing. Since many academics (and some members of the general public) view stock car racing as a “Southern Tradition,” I focused my case study on three specific questions related to stock car racing and identity: 1. What was the relationship between NASCAR, the track and the fans? 2. What is the relationship between local stock car racing history and a specific local track? 3. Were symbols of Southern American or local values present at the track? By answering these three questions, I was able to determine the validity of the claim that stock car racing is a “Southern” tradition.

Methodology

Most social science examinations of sports have focused upon a media analysis approach. As Klein (2000) has noted, social scientists must not assume that the depictions of sports fans attitudes characterized in the media (and by implication academics) are representative of the opinions and attitudes of sports fans. In order to

correct for these problems, I attempted to employ an ethnographic method similar to the one that Klein uses in his 2000 study of Red Sox fans. Klein went to Red Sox games and positioned himself in different parts of the stadium in order to interact with fans. Klein informally interacted with fans and through his conversations with these fans and his observations, he determined their views about recently acquired Dominican pitcher, Pedro Martinez. Like Klein, I used a participant-observation methodology to discern the beliefs and attitudes of stock car fans in their “natural” environment.

From May 2005 to September 2005, I attended fifteen of the weekly stock car races that are held every Saturday at City Speedway from April to mid-September. (In documenting my research, I chose to use pseudonyms for all locations and individuals with whom I interacted. Thus, any names of persons or locations that are described in this case study do not represent the actual names of these persons or locations.). In this case, participant-observation at these races entailed observing the ways in which fans interacted, observing the ways in which the track promoted itself and local stock car racing history, speaking informally with fans about stock car racing and collecting some recorded interviews. From this observation, conversation and interviewing, I produced field notes that documented what I saw and that documented the content of informal interviews with fans. Formal interviews were recorded and then transcribed by me. My field notes and recorded interviews were my primary sources of information for this case study.

Before interacting with fans, I explained to them what my research project entailed and why I was doing research. As required by The Human Subjects

Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) at Western Michigan University (WMU), I gave each person that I interacted with a card which described the purpose of my project and contained the numbers of my advisor (Dr. Laura Spielvogel), the current Chair of Anthropology at WMU (Dr. Robert Ulin), HSIRB at WMU and the WMU Vice President for Research (Jack Luderer). In my field notes I noted when I gave a fan a card and when I obtained their permission to be part of my ethnographic research.

I did not know the names of any of the fans with whom I interacted. I did not ask for their names nor did I ask for any personal information beyond their approximate age, town or city of residence and occupation. Despite receiving this “personal” information, it would be impossible for someone to associate this information with a specific fan. For example, if I knew that a fan was in his fifties, lived in the local area and was “retired,” this would not provide enough information for anyone to determine their identity since there are many retired people in their fifties living in the local area.

During periods when noise level was not an issue, I walked around the track and interacted (or attempted to interact) with racing fans. When practice or races were occurring, I made sure that I sat in the same spot at the track at every race (the far left bleachers if one were facing the track entrance from the parking lot). I chose the same spot in order to compare the composition of fans from different races. If I had changed seating areas, any comparisons that I made might be the result of the placement of the stands and not weekly changes in crowd composition.

Difficulties

Through the course of attending races at City Speedway, I encountered a number of difficulties when interacting with fans. I had originally intended to interact and record interviews with between 10 and 25 fans at City Speedway and attend 16 races. I was unable to attend one race because of a car accident (which led to lack of available transportation to the track) while, due to five different factors, I was only able to record two interviews with fans, one with a fan in the stands and one with the owner of the track. First, a number of fans did not want to interact with me or have themselves recorded. I respected their wishes and did not attempt to convince or coerce them into being interviewed. Since sports are a form of entertainment, it is possible that these fans did not want to interact with me because they did not want me to interrupt their entertainment experience at the track. It is also possible that some of these fans shared some unknown factor (e.g. annoyance at some unconscious habits which I may have, representing a certain occupation or social class, etc.). I have no way of knowing if this is the case.

Second, based upon the level of sound produced by stock cars (and in some cases other forms of racecars), there was a limited period of time during which I could interact with or interview racing fans. Stock car engines produce enough sound to make most conversations inaudible. On most Saturdays, the gates to City Speedway opened at approximately 4:00 PM, one hour before practice that began at 5:00 PM. During the practice period, noise levels were loud enough to impede conversation. Practice usually ended at approximately 6:30 P.M. with actual racing

beginning at 7:00 PM. Thus, I only had a one hour and a one half-hour window during which I could have uninterrupted interaction with fans.

This small time window limited the number of fans with whom I could interact. Some fans arrived during practice or just before the 7:00 PM starting time for races. Most of the fans who were available from 4:00 PM to 5:00 PM are what I would classify as “regulars.” In other words, these fans attended almost all of the races that I attended. Many of these “regular” fans had on previous occasions expressed their disinterest in interacting with me or participating in my study. This lead to a smaller pool of available fans.

Third, in most cases, I was only able to approach white male fans who were alone. This was primarily due to the fact that most groups of people were in constant interaction before races and I did not want to interrupt their conversations. This was especially true of groups with children since oftentimes adults in these groups either had to discipline children, prevent them from moving away from their seating area or keep them entertained before the race. In all cases, female spectators were part of groups of people (both mixed sex and all female). In addition, I did not notice any non-white spectators until after races had begun.

Fourth, at some races weather appeared to be an issue. During time periods when rain was predicted and/or it was very hot, crowds at City Speedway seemed noticeably smaller than times when there was “better” weather. In some cases, races were delayed or canceled due to rain. These weather related issues meant that on some days, there were fewer fans with whom I could possibly interact.

Finally, above the track are 43 luxury boxes that hold between eight and sixteen people. Forty-one of these luxury boxes were rented for the entire racing season with two reserved for track sponsors. I did not have access to these luxury boxes. The owner of the track told me in an interview (August 20, 2005) that he believed that there was no difference between spectators in luxury boxes and spectators that sat in the general admission seating area. He did indicate that one luxury box was rented by a local car dealership and some may have been rented by drivers for their families. However, he believed that in terms of class, the majority of luxury boxes were rented by fans no different than those in the stands (track owner, 2005). While this may be true, there might be some difference in beliefs or behavior that would motivate certain fans to pay for luxury boxes instead of sitting in the general admission bleachers. Because of this, I do not know if self-defined fans in luxury boxes have views about stock car racing that significantly differ from general admission fans.

While I was only able to interview two people, my informal interactions with fans and observations of fans confirmed much of what was said during interviews. In addition, my arguments do not rest on the assumption that all stock car racing fans are part of a monolithic group which has shared views on racing. This is unlike other academics examining stock car racing who assume that either stock car fans share values (Alderman et al. 2002) or that stock car fans can be broken into two monolithic groups, “traditional” Southern fans and “new” national fans (Pillsbury 1995 [1989]; Hurt 2005). I only need to show that for some fans the supposed relationship between

stock car racing and the “South” (or nationalized stock car racing) is far more complex than that posited by academics examining stock car racing.

CHAPTER 8

CASE STUDY: DEFINING FANS

For the purposes of this research I had to decide how I would define “stock car racing fans.” In order to define what is meant by the term “stock car racing fan,” it is necessary to define the social category of fan (*Note*: some British social science researchers will sometimes use the word “supporter” instead of fan. In most cases they use the word interchangeably with the word “fan.” [See for example Crawford 2003, Giulianotti 1994, Scott and Reicher 1998]). Wann defines a (sports) fan as “one who is enthusiastic about a particular sport or athlete (Wann 1995: 377).” This definition seems to be the definition employed by most social science researchers examining sports fans. However, what constitutes “enthusiastic” varies based upon the methodological and theoretical approaches employed by the researcher. Quantitative approaches to studying sports fans such as those used by Wann (1995), Wakefield (1995), and Bernthal and Graham (2003) have assumed that there are certain measurable qualities of fans that can be quantified and compared. In general, these researchers have focused on developing quantitative scales that can be used to measure why specific fans are motivated to engage in certain behaviors (e.g. attending games or watching specific sports on television). By assuming that these fan motivations are measurable entities, they imply that the social category of “fan” is a real and universal cultural category that “exists” independent of local cultural, political and economic circumstances.

The use of the term “fan” in quantitative studies is extremely problematic because it does not take into account that fans are socially produced categories that

exist within the context of specific cultural, political and economic circumstances. Who counts as an “enthusiastic” supporter of a team will vary within a particular cultural context. For example Klein (2000) has shown that race and nationality can be factors that affect whether people consider an individual to be a fan of particular sports or athletes. In his study of the attitudes of white and Dominican spectators at Red Sox baseball games, Klein examined the attitudes of white fans and newly present Dominican fans in relation to Pedro Martinez, a Dominican pitcher for the Red Sox from 1998 to 2004. Klein found that attitudes of what constituted a fan among these two groups of fans were related to the specific history of Red Sox baseball.

Historically, the Red Sox and their spectators have had a reputation for mistreatment of non-whites. This reputation was directly related to a number of racial incidents both within the Red Sox corporate organization and among spectators themselves. Klein argues that the legacy of these events can be seen in the attitudes of some white spectators at games. Many white spectators did not consider newly present Dominican baseball spectators to be “real fans” but interlopers who did not belong in the stands.

In contrast to white fans, Dominicans conceived of themselves as fans of Pedro Martinez, a Dominican pitcher. They saw their presence at baseball games as a way to support one of their own nationality. Their presence at games and self-definition as a fan depended upon the presence of players of Dominican nationality. Thus, white views on what constituted a “fan” were related to specific historical issues related to racism while Dominican views of what constituted a “fan” were

related to the historically contingent presence or lack of presence of players of their nationality. This indicates that the category of fan is far more subjective and ambiguous than quantitative research would have us believe.

Those researchers who have used ethnographic approaches to examine sports fans have taken a more subjective and culturally specific view of the term “fan.” For these researchers, “enthusiasm” must be related to specific cultural, political and economic circumstances. They have generally avoided the problems of quantitative approaches. However, many of these studies have limited the ways in which this subjectivity can manifest itself.

Much of the ethnographic research examining sports fans has been carried out by British researchers examining sports “supporters.” British research on “supporters” has largely focused on sports violence related to football (soccer). “Supporters” in these studies are defined in terms of groups of people who self-define their group as “supporters” of a specific football (soccer) team. Being a “supporter” is contingent upon acceptance into this group and attending games of the team which they support (Giulianotti 1994, Scott and Reicher 1998). Thus, for these researchers, a “supporter” is not a “real” entity but an individual whose identity as a “supporter” is defined by the subjective opinions of a specific group of people. These opinions could potentially change over time based on new political, economic or cultural circumstances.

Defining “supporters” in terms of group membership is problematic in that it ignores solitary individuals or “non-official” groups who could be defined by some as “supporters.” Individuals who regularly watch games on the television (with or

without a group) or who attend games by themselves could not be considered “supporters” in the definition employed by British researchers examining sports violence. This privileges the ability of certain members of given society by giving them the power to decide what constitutes the “official” definition of fan in a particular cultural context. In doing so British researchers ignore conflicts over the term “supporter” or “fan” that may exist within a given society or within the very groups of “supporters” that they study.

British sociologist Crawford (2003) has argued that “supporters” (and “fans”) should be defined in terms of a continuum instead of their membership within a specific group of people. Where fans exist on this continuum depends upon their level of involvement in a “fan community” related to a specific sports team. At the bottom of this continuum are people who self-identify as “supporters” or “fans” while at the top of this continuum are people who are heavily involved in the “fan community.” During their “career” as supporters, people can fluctuate between different positions on this continuum based upon specific localized social and economic circumstances and/or acceptance by other into the local “fan community.”

Crawford’s definition of “supporter” (i.e. “fan”) allows for subjectivity in that changes in local subjective definitions of what constitutes a supporter have an affect upon who is allowed to participate in a local “fan community.” However, his definition of “supporter” is problematic in that it presupposes that a singular “fan community” exists in relation to a specific sports team or athlete. It is possible that there might be multiple fan communities that exist in relation to a given sports team. For example Klein (2003) has noted that the Dominican “community” of Red Sox

fans was socially separated from most of the white “community” of fans during the 1999 Red Sox baseball season. Thus, there were two “communities” of fans that attended baseball games during that particular year.

It is also possible that some “fans” are socially connected to each other “outside” of sports. For example, it is possible that some groups of self-identified fans have been friends or members of the same family before they attended games. Thus, their involvement in sports might be only one component of their social interactions with each other. Because of this it would be impossible to define all of their interactions related to sports as constituting membership in a “fan community.”

Because of the problems inherent in various definitions of fans that have been used by social scientists, it is important that social scientists define fans in terms of people’s self-identification as fans. Kelly (1997) has argued that fans are creative consumers with the potential to both disrupt and reinforce symbolic associations within a given sport. By consuming sports, fans are consciously involving themselves in the process through which cultural associations with sport are formed. This implies that the category of fan is ever changing within a given cultural context. By allowing people to define for themselves what it means to be sports fans, researchers are able to more accurately portray the subjective ways in which people construct their identity as fans or the identities of others as fans. This allows for the possibility that a researcher’s personal definition of the word “fan” is not necessarily shared by those whom he or she studies. Thus, any people who I refer to as “stock car fans” or “NASCAR fans” have self-identified themselves as fans and have not been categorized based on an “objective” definition of what constitutes a fan.

CHAPTER 9

CASE STUDY: GENERAL FEATURES OF CITY SPEEDWAY

The Track Itself

City Speedway is a 3/8th mile, paved, oval auto-racing track located in the Midwest with a maximum seating capacity of 6500 people. It is one of 43 racetracks in its state (as of 2005). The seating area of the track is split into five bleacher sections, a number of luxury boxes and two “decks.” The bleacher areas are available to spectators that pay general admission that usually ranges between \$10 and \$25 depending upon if there were special races on a given Saturday (see below). The bleachers surround approximately half of the track. They are divided between a central main grandstand and two smaller sections of bleachers on both the right and left of the main grandstand. A portion of the main grandstand is set aside as the “family section” where no alcoholic beverages or smoking is allowed. Spectators can sit wherever they like and are not assigned specific seats.

Above the bleachers are luxury boxes. Spectators can pay to occupy these boxes for an entire racing season (April to September). Based upon what I could see from outside, luxury boxes appear to have backed seating and television sets within each box. However, unlike luxury boxes at “superspeedways” or national sporting events (NHL, NFL, etc.), spectators must go to the concession stands of the track to get their own food.

The two “decks,” the Hardings Party Deck and the Home Depot Hospitality Deck are specifically reserved for special group outings; generally paid for by local businesses or charities. For example, a local car dealership that sponsors the track’s

pace car held a party for all its employees during one race weekend. At these group outings, there was generally a barbecue that was used to provide food for members of the various groups. When the decks were not being used by a group of people (in most cases at least one deck was unused), disabled spectators would use the deck as a location to sit.

The track has two concession stands including an ice cream stand during hot months and a tent that sells *Little Caesar's Pizza*. The main concession areas sell “typical” fast food such as hotdogs, hamburgers, french fries, soda, etc. The track itself does not sell alcoholic beverages although they do allow fans to bring them to the track. Fans can also bring their own coolers that can contain their own beverages and food.

In addition to the concession stands the track has a gift shop (trailer?) which sells stock car racing memorabilia related to the track and a photo stand where fans can buy photos or videos of past races. Memorabilia sold at the track includes objects related to local drivers and the local track as well as some NASCAR memorabilia. These objects include t-shirts, hats, bumper stickers, model cars, etc.

From April until mid-September, City Speedway has weekly races every Saturday and some special weekday and Sunday races. During Saturday races, City Speedway generally has races for four classes of stock cars: pure stocks, sport stocks, limited late models and super late models. These classes vary based upon a number of technical issues related to body shape (e.g. lack or presence of a spoiler), rules regulating what sorts of engines and other parts the various stocks can have, and the cash prizes available to drivers. Generally, most races follow the same schedule.

Gates to the track open at 4:00. From 5:00 to 6:30 drivers from the various stocks are given time to practice in order to determine if they have to make any adjustments to their vehicles. At 7:00, drivers in each stock compete in eight to twelve lap heat races to determine who will compete in “feature” races held later that night. Where a driver is positioned in the heat races determines whether or not he or she could compete in the feature races (this varied based upon the particular stock). Those who position high enough to compete in the heat races have their starting position randomly determined for the “feature race.” After a short intermission following the heat races, “feature races” generally begin between 8:30 and 10:00 (depending upon how long the heat races took, if there were any crashes, etc.). “Feature” races usually last at least 20 laps or more depending upon the particular stock. Usually races end by 11:00 or 11:30 though they can go later if there are many accidents or weather related delays.

Depending upon where one finishes during the “feature races” (and some other factors such as number of laps lead), drivers are awarded a number of driver points and possibly a cash prize (depending upon one’s position). At the end of the year drivers are ranked based upon the total number of points they have received for the entire racing season. The person with the most points is declared the track champion for a particular stock and awarded a cash prize.

In addition to these four stocks, some Saturdays, City Speedway holds special races for various regional racing organizing bodies. These include but are not limited to the Hoosier Winged Super Sprints, Legends (older style stock cars), Vintage Modifieds, and a truck racing series. When special races are held, the same racing

schedule is usually maintained with special heat races or qualifying (individual cars timed to determine position in the feature) and special features added to the schedule. In one case (June 11, 2005), no stock car races took place and were replaced by the “Open Wheel Spectacular” event (which included midgets, supermodifieds, legends and modifieds.)

The Drivers

The majority of drivers for each race were white males. The owner indicated that there were only two full time female drivers and two part-time female drivers (interview, August 20, 2005). While I did not know the exact ages of every driver, there appeared to be a large age range among drivers. Drivers as young as 14 years old could (and did) compete in the pure stock class while the other classes required that drivers be at least 16 years of age. Based upon references made by announcers, some of the drivers had to be at least in their early fifties since they had been racing for approximately 20 to 30 years (the 14 year-old age requirement was relatively recent).

I am unsure of the “class” position of drivers. According to the owner, it costs between ten thousand dollars (for pure stocks) and approximately thirty to forty thousand dollars (for Super Late Models) for a driver to race one season at City Speedway (interview, August 20, 2005). While many drivers do have relationships with sponsors, the owner indicated that these relationships could encompass a wide range of financial support. This could include as little as one hundred dollars for a sticker on a car or several thousand dollars for other sponsorship arrangements. The costs of maintaining a racecar for certain classes would seem to indicate that certain

“lower-class” or “working-class” drivers would be unable to race without extensive investment from sponsors. This might indicate that it is more difficult for “working-class” individuals to race at City Speedway and therefore, they may be underrepresented among drivers (especially in the more expensive stocks).

Some of the drivers represented multiple generations of families who were involved in racing. The owner estimated that approximately fifty percent of the drivers at the track had relatives who raced now or relatives who had raced in the past (interview, August 20, 2005). An example of a multi-generational family involved in racing is the Bordon family: Arny Bordon, Sr. racing super late models and Limited Late Models, his son Arny Bordon, Jr. racing purestocks, other son Peter Bordon racing Super Late Models and brother Jim Bordon racing limited late models.

According to Arny Bordon’s official website, his father, Gerald Bordon, raced at various regional tracks from 1960 to 1983 while Arny Bordon began his racing career in 1983. This indicates that members of the Bordon family have been involved in racing for at least 45 years. It is unclear if this pattern holds among other families who have had multiple generations of drivers. In some cases the announcers would indicate that certain drivers fathers or grandfathers had been involved in racing but they did not always indicate when these drivers began racing. In some cases they did make reference to the late 1960’s. However, because stock car racing occurred at City Speedway during the 1950’s, it is possible that there could be multigenerational families of drivers that began racing before 1960.

The Spectators and Fans

The number of spectators that attended races varied. The owner estimates that the average attendance of the track is approximately 3500 spectators (interview, August 20, 2005). He stated that the lowest attended races have approximately 2200 fans while the highest attended races have approximately 5000 fans. Based upon my observations, the race that appeared to have the highest attendance occurred during the July 4th weekend. At this time, the track had to use parts of the “decks” for seating general admission spectators. The races that appeared to have the lowest attendance were races when either rain was predicted (or it seemed that rain had occurred) or when it was extremely hot. This was confirmed by the owner who indicated that City Speedway tended to get less attendance when there was rain or during the hotter months of the year (July and August).

There is no accurate demographic information available about spectators at City Speedway. The track does not do any sort of market research to determine the demographics of spectators nor have any other individuals or organizations done such research. Because of this, all information on fan demographics is based on my own personal observations.

In terms of gender, I would estimate that between 40% to 50% of the people at the track were women. In terms of race, the overwhelming majority of spectators appeared to be white. However, at each race in the general admission area, I saw at least one individual who would most likely be classified as black. During at least two races, I saw two separate groups (one per race) that were all black. I assumed that these groups might be families because they were made up of one adult man, one

adult woman and one or more children. In the other cases, black individuals were part of a mixed race group of two or more individuals. Since race is a subjective, culturally based category, I do not know how the individuals who I identified as black would identify themselves (e.g. if they would identify themselves as being of mixed race or as inhabiting an entirely different racial category) nor do I know if any of the individuals who I would classify as white would indicate that they are of a different racial category. Because of this, it is difficult to be sure if my observations accurately represent the racial makeup of the crowd (or how most spectators would classify the racial makeup of the crowd).

In terms of age, there appeared to be a wide age range of spectators present at the track. People ranged in age from infants to elderly adults. With the exception of small infants, age distribution appeared to be fairly equal for all age categories. However, since I did not survey the ages of most spectators, my visual assessment of ages does not necessarily present an accurate picture of the demographics at the track.

In general, spectators could be classified into a number of groups. Whether all of these spectators considered themselves to be stock car racing fans (or fans of NASCAR) is unknown. There was a clear distinction between spectators who came to the track alone and spectators who came to the track in groups. All of the spectators who came to the track by themselves appeared to be adult, white males. In contrast, groups of spectators varied in their makeup based on age and gender. There did not appear to be one single characteristic that all groups shared in terms of size, age or gender composition.

Despite the variation among groups of spectators there were two specific groups of fans that had their own specific features. First, a significant portion of the groups appeared to be related to one another and may have defined themselves as members of a family. These included “couples” with children, single adult men or women with children and multigenerational groups of fans which included “older” adults, adults and children. While at the track, adults in these possible “families” spent much of their time disciplining children, getting food and/or escorting “their” children to the bathroom facilities.

Second, a number of groups appeared to be at the track because they were related to or friends with a specific driver. I determined that these groups were at the races because of a relationship with a given driver because of four different reasons:

1. Those in the group made reference to going to the pit area after a particular race to see a specific driver.
2. Members of the group yelled to drivers or pit crew members in the infield pit area of the track.
3. I overheard members make specific reference to knowing a driver outside of the track (as a friend or family member) and/or specifically stated that they were at the track because they knew a specific driver.
4. If members of the groups used terms of endearment (e.g. honey, sweetie, etc.) or kinship terms (e.g. dad, son, etc.) when cheering drivers. There were at least two different groups of these fans near where I sat at every race. Some of these groups left the stands (presumably to go to the pit area) after their driver had finished a feature race or failed to qualify for the feature.

There were three other categories of fans that crosscut both groups and individual fans. First, there were spectators that appeared to attend only one or two

races at most (either in groups or as individuals). This seemed to be the majority of spectators. I do not have enough information to speculate why certain people might only attend one race.

Second, there were spectators who attended the track because they were fans of the particular cars or series involved in a special Saturday race. Some of the individuals whom I approached at special race weekends told me that they were only there for the special (non-stock car) race. In addition, on nights when special races occurred, I noticed that some spectators attending the race wore memorabilia (hats, shirts, etc.) related to drivers from the special races. This seems to indicate that there may be spectators who follow specific regional racing series and thus only attend tracks when these series are running races.

Finally, there were spectators that I would define as “regulars.” “Regulars” were individuals whom I observed attending most races at City Speedway. I would estimate that I saw between forty and fifty regulars in the stands before the races began. It is possible that these regulars represented individuals who had bought season racing passes for City Speedway. Season racing passes allow one to attend all of the races during one season at City Speedway while providing an overall discount on admission. According to the owner, City Speedway sells approximately 225 season grandstand passes a year (interview, August 20, 2005). While I only saw a limited number of “regulars,” it is entirely possible that other fans with seasonal passes came much later than the other “regulars” that I observed.

One would presume that if stereotypes of stock car fans are correct then the majority of spectators at a stock car racing track should be “working-class” adult,

white, males. While adult, white, male fans made up a significant portion of the crowd, the presence of families, women, some minorities and young children seems to indicate that racing spectatorship may contain more diversity than has been previously speculated. This may signify that stock car racing is not (or is no longer perceived by many as) a sport for adult, white males but that many people may view it as a form of entertainment equivalent to other forms of entertainment that families attend.

The majority of spectators appeared to only interact with those spectators who came with them to the races. Occasionally, I would see spectators interact with people whom they knew outside of the track. For example, a friend from work or neighbor might approach another fan that they knew and briefly engage them in conversation. These conversations would begin with a greeting that was usually followed with conversation about what was going on in each individual's life. After this brief interaction, one of the individuals in conversation would indicate that they had to return to their place in the stands or that they had to go somewhere else (such as the concession stands) and they would leave, never to be seen again.

In other rare cases, I would see fans engage other fans in conversation about events on the track or racing in general. These conversations would generally occur in response to unusual events on the track such as unique accidents (e.g. a flipped car, an extremely rare occurrence) or a last second win. These conversations would be brief and generally end once something else on the track attracted people's attention.

The general lack of interaction among spectators seems to indicate spectators at City Speedway do not necessarily consider themselves part of a socially connected

group. Instead interaction among separate groups or individuals is fragmentary and intermittent. Since I did not interact with the majority of spectators at City Speedway, it is unclear whether or not the majority of people who attend the races consider themselves to be stock car racing fans, NASCAR fans or both. While I am uncertain which spectators classify themselves as fans (beyond those whom I interacted with and some whom I observed directly), it is clear that a coherent “fan community” does not exist at City Speedway.

CHAPTER 10

CASE STUDY: RESULTS

What is the Relationship Between NASCAR, City Speedway and Fans?

As noted earlier, academic examinations of NASCAR conflate the history of NASCAR and the history of stock car racing. Since NASCAR is presumed to be inseparable from stock car racing, it is necessary to determine how NASCAR is related to City Speedway both officially as a race organizing body and unofficially among fans. The official relationship between NASCAR and City Speedway is very different from the way in which local stock car racing fans understand the relationship between NASCAR and local stock car racing.

Officially, since the early 1990's City Speedway has been associated with NASCAR. Currently, City Speedway is part of the NASCAR Dodge Weekly Racing Series (hereafter referred to as DWRS) for its Sport Stocks, Limited Late Models and Super Late Models. Pure stocks are not part of this racing series since NASCAR requires that drivers be at least sixteen to compete and City Speedway allows drivers as young as fourteen to race pure stock cars (interview with track owner, August 20, 2005). The DWRS is based on a racing points system. Tracks that are part of the DWRS are nationally divided into four divisions. Points are awarded based on track position in features and other factors such as leading the most laps in a given race. While drivers compete locally for points and may be awarded prizes based on their local track performance, their point totals are compared to those of drivers at all other tracks within their DWRS division (www.nascar.com). The drivers with the highest

point totals of all drivers in their particular class of stock car are considered the national champion of that class and win a cash prize.

In order to be a member of the NASCAR DWRS, City Speedway must pay a fee to NASCAR in order to be able to use the NASCAR name and NASCAR related trademarks. In addition they must apply certain technical standards to the different classes of stock cars, meet certain minimum levels of safety standards and enact certain rules for individual races. In return, City Speedway receives two main benefits for membership in NASCAR. First, membership provides those drivers involved in the DWRS with health insurance benefits that they would otherwise not have. According to the owner, NASCAR provides each race car driver with a million dollars worth of insurance coverage for all injuries received at the track (interview, August 20, 2005). He noted that this differs from other tracks such as Small Speedway, the closest stock car track to City Speedway, which have insurance policies that cover approximately \$10, 000 worth of injury. If this is true, NASCAR's insurance policy allows the track to better ensure the safety of its competitors and possibly provides drivers with an incentive to drive at City Speedway instead of other tracks.

Second, NASCAR membership provides City Speedway with national sponsorship that would otherwise not be available to them. According to the owner, current sponsors such as 3M and Coca Cola would not sponsor City Speedway if not for its association with NASCAR (interview, August 20, 2005). These sponsors provide the track with more money than some local sponsors.

Finally, NASCAR provides City Speedway with an important symbolic tool with which they can market the track. City Speedway is one of two tracks in its state associated with NASCAR. The other track is a superspeedway related to NASCAR through the NEXTEL Cup, Busch and Craftsman Truck Series races that are held intermittently throughout the year. While City Speedway may not have the “top level” races held at the other track, City Speedway’s association with NASCAR could differentiate itself from other local short tracks that are unassociated with NASCAR. By associating itself with NASCAR, the most well known racing organizing body in the United States, City Speedway could potentially portray itself as being a more professionally run track than other tracks. In addition, websites that list short tracks associated with NASCAR and NASCAR’s official DWRS site provide an avenue of promotion for the track that would otherwise be unavailable to City Speedway.

In contrast to the official relationship with NASCAR, fans with whom I interacted made a distinction between NASCAR and stock car racing at City Speedway. All of the fans with whom I interacted implicitly argued that being a “NASCAR fan” represented being a fan of the NASCAR NEXTEL Cup Series but did not indicate that one was a fan of stock car racing in general. One fan with whom I recorded an interview, a white, male, retired papermaker and resident who lived near City Speedway (hereafter referred to as Bob), indicated that he considered NASCAR to represent the NEXTEL Cup Racing Series. The following is an excerpt from my transcription of his interview:

Me: How often do you attend NASCAR events?

Bob: I go to probably 6 or 7 NASCAR events a year. I’ve already been to..

Me: You mean like Nextel Cup.

Bob: Nextel Cup, I was in Daytona for the race. I was at Taladaga. I was at Bristol. I've already been to three of them. I will go to both MIS races. One Pocono race. So I'll probably go to 6 or 7 events.
[May 14, 2005]

If Bob thought that a "NASCAR event" encompassed being a fan of all stock car races sanctioned by NASCAR then he would have included local races sanctioned by NASCAR.

Bob made a distinction between being a "race fan" and being a "NASCAR" fan. When asked, "When did you become first aware of NASCAR in your life?," Bob responded, "Probably about 15 years ago. I've been a race fan for probably 45, 50 years. I've been coming here for probably 46 years [May 14, 2005]." When asked how people reacted to him being a NASCAR fan, Bob stated, "I'm a NASCAR fan. I'm a race fan first, NASCAR fan second." The responses to these questions seem to indicate that Bob believed that there was a distinction between being a "NASCAR fan" and a "[stock car] racing fan." The point in Bob's life when he became aware of NASCAR is separate from the point in his life when he became a race fan. In addition, Bob saw being a NASCAR fan as a subcategory of his stock car fandom. He clearly privileged stock car fandom over NASCAR fandom. These conclusions are further supported by Bob's response to the question, "What made you become a race fan in the first place?" Bob responded, "My relatives were stock car racers at this track right here." This response seems to indicate that for Bob being a race fan meant being a "stock car fan." Bob specifically refers to his relatives as stock car racers but not as (generic) racers.

Other fans with whom I interacted or observed appeared to hold a similar distinction between being “NASCAR” fans (i.e. NEXTEL Cup fans) and being stock car racing fans. For example, while waiting for a feature race to restart after a significant crash, I overheard a white, male fan who appeared to be in his early thirties (hereafter referred to as Jack) interacting with other spectators at the track. He was at the track with another white male of similar age. This was one of the few instances that I observed a fan interacting with fans who were not members of his or her group. Jack was attempting to get spectators to cheer for him if he entered one of the stock car races during the following the week. He indicated that he might be racing during the next week if he secured the (financial?) help of one his friends.

Jack asked fans sitting nearby if they were NASCAR fans. They responded that they were and he asked who their favorite drivers were. This lead to a discussion of the differences between certain NEXTEL cup drivers. Jack appeared to be using the discussion of NASCAR as a way to establish a rapport with those around him. After this discussion of NASCAR, Jack indicated that he might be racing in one of the stock car races during the next week. In describing why he might be racing, he stated that “I’ve wanted to race all of my life” and that “I’ve been a race fan most of my life.”

Jack’s conversation with other NASCAR fans seems to indicate a distinction between being a NASCAR fan and being a stock car racing fan that is similar to that of Bob. The discussion of NEXTEL Cup drivers seems to indicate that Jack and the fans with whom he interacted clearly see being a NASCAR Fan as representative of being a NEXTEL CUP fan. Jack’s comment that he has been a race fan for most of

his life and that he has wanted to race most of his life seem to indicate that he considers local stock car racing as separate from NASCAR. By specifically focusing on using the term racing and not describing local racing in terms of NASCAR, Jack indicates that racing at City Speedway would not make him a NASCAR driver but just a generic “racer.”

The views of fans at City Speedway clearly indicate that all people do not consider being NASCAR fans and stock car racing fans to be the same phenomenon. This shows that while in some cases there is an “official” association between NASCAR and stock car racing, some fans know that NASCAR and NASCAR NEXTEL Cup Racing does not represent all stock car racing. If the academic view was true that NASCAR is virtually synonymous with stock car racing then fans should not make this distinction. This indicates that while NASCAR is officially a race organizing body, some stock car racing fans have different cultural understandings about what NASCAR represents. Instead, for these fans NASCAR represents NEXTEL Cup racing.

By defining NASCAR as representative of the NEXTEL Cup Series, fans place NASCAR in a similar position to the other “major” sports leagues within the United States. For example, the National Football League (NFL) controls both the highly ranked NFL and the lower ranked, developmental league NFL Europe while within NCAA football there are four divisions (1A, 1AA, 2, 3). However, when one says that one is a fan of the NFL or of NCAA Football, one generally means that one is a fan of the NFL in the United States (as opposed to NFL Europe) or that one is fan of Division 1 NCAA football (see for example the titling of football video games

such as NFL 2K3 by Sega or NCAA Football by Electronic Arts). Thus, defining a sport organizing body by its highest ranked league or division is not particularly unique. This implies that this separation between NASCAR fans and stock car fans is related to larger American conventions of naming sports leagues and is unrelated to any specific features that are unique to NASCAR.

What is the Relationship Between Local Stock Car Racing History and City Speedway?

Officially, City Speedway markets itself as representing a long presence of stock car racing in its local region. The official website of City Speedway indicates that City Speedway opened on July 2, 1950. During races numerous references were made to local racing history in the immediate area. The birthdays of some former drivers (including some who had raced in the 1960's) were announced over the loudspeakers. During pre-race prayers (see next section), sometimes spectators would be asked to pray for the wellbeing of injured or sick individuals who had been historically involved in stock car racing in the local region. When current drivers had familial connections to drivers who had raced in the past, these connections were emphasized when these current drivers won races. In addition, announcers sometimes made reference to races that had occurred at City Speedway in the distant past (i.e. 1970's and earlier).

The owner of the track had extensive historical involvement with the track. From 1978 to sometime in the 1990's, he was a driver at City Speedway. He had only recently bought the track in 2001 whereas the previous owner had owned the track for approximately seventeen years. Despite recent ownership of the track, the owner's patio and window business had done extensive work at the track (including

installing luxury boxes) from the early 1990's until he bought the track, and he continued to attend races after being a driver (interview, August 20, 2005). In total, the owner was involved in racing at City Speedway for approximately 28 years.

As noted earlier, many of the drivers at City speedway were part of multi-generational families of stock car racers. These multi-generational families are a direct link to the past history of City Speedway. They are symbolic representatives of the local stock car racing history of City Speedway. By mentioning the familial history of local drivers when they win, the track establishes a historical connection between the present and the past. This in turn places an emphasis on the local nature of stock car racing instead of emphasizing connections with national or regional identity.

Local stock car racing fans seemed to relate to the past history of stock car racing at City Speedway. Some fans indicated that they had been coming to the track for at least 40 to 50 years and that during this time period they were stock car racing fans. For example, Bob stated that he had been coming to City Speedway for approximately 46 years (i.e. since approximately 1960). As noted earlier, Bob stated that he had become a "race fan" because some of his relatives were stock car racers. Later, in the interview Bob stated, "Most of these stock car racers out there, I've known them. I've known their fathers when they raced before that (interview, May 14, 2005)." This seems to indicate that for Bob, his identity as a stock car fan is tied (and was tied in the past) to the local history of City Speedway instead of "the South" or America. The personal connections that he had to various drivers at City

Speedway could not have existed if the South was the place where stock car racing originated.

Other fans expressed similar attitudes towards the history of stock car racing though they did not necessarily have the personal connections to the track like those of Bob. Jack when talking to other fans around him implied that he had been coming to the track since sometime in the 1980's and that his relatives (presumably some of his parents or grandparents) had been attending races many years before he was born. This seems to indicate that Jack was using historical connections with the track to bolster his previously mentioned claim that "I've wanted to race all of my life" and that he had been a "race fan all of his life." In this sense the connection to the past was used as a way to define himself as a "real" stock car racing fan and not as a casual dabbler in the sport.

If, as most academics presume, the geographic expansion of NASCAR took place during the 1980's then the current importance of local stock car racing history, the promotion of the track, the owner's extensive involvement in racing, the existence of multi-generational racing fans and fan connections to local stock car racing history should not exist. This indicates that one can not claim that there is a monolithic relationship between the history of stock car racing and the South. At some tracks, there is likely an important cultural relationship between local, stock car racing history and involvement in stock car racing by both those involved in track management and fans who attend races. Even if one were to presume that traditions do exist, the importance of the local history of City Speedway would seem to indicate multiple possible "local traditions" of stock car racing.

What Symbols Were Present at City Speedway?

At City Speedway I noted the presence of various dominant symbols that were associated with either the track or fans. If, as Alderman et al. (2003), posit, Southern values have traveled with the supposed geographic expansion of NASCAR, then symbols of Southern identity should be present at City Speedway. If, however, as Pillsbury (1995 [1989]) and Hurt (2005) posit, stock car racing is experiencing “nationalization” and a decline in the presence of “Southern” symbols then one should see explicit connections between NASCAR and American symbols of identity.

The symbolic ways in which the track officially presented itself to the public encompassed four broad symbolic categories. First, the track officially associated itself with American identity before races began by using symbols of American identity. Before each race the track would have someone sing the national anthem and throughout the race there would be an American flag flying on a flagpole in the center of the track. However, this does not seem to indicate a special association between stock car racing and American identity. Almost all sporting events in the United States have a performance or recording of the national anthem before the event begins and many public buildings and recreation areas fly the American flag. Even if we were to presume that a sport was limited to a certain geographic region in the United States (and specifically the South), it seems doubtful that they would not sing the national anthem before sporting events or lack the presence of the American flag.

Second, the track officially associated itself with Christianity by having someone announce a prayer every Saturday before the beginning of races. The prayer

made clear reference to Jesus Christ and other elements of Christian theology. While symbolic displays of religion at public events may be stereotypically associated with the “South,” they have an extensive presence at both sporting and non-sport events outside of the South. At sporting events this would include the presence of John 3:16 signs at football games and references to god by athletes after wins. At non-sporting events this would include the use of a bible to swear in the President to office or witnesses at trials and the pre-meeting prayers at some city councils in the “North” (e.g. city council meeting in Rochester, NH). This indicates that the presence of Christian religious symbols does not necessarily symbolize “Southern values.”

Third, as noted earlier the track actively promoted the local history of stock car racing in its region. The use of local history to symbolically promote the track undercuts national symbols of identity. By placing an emphasis on the local character of racing, City Speedway implies that there might be some unique characteristics of racing at the track that differentiate it from other tracks in its state and nationally. This privileges local characteristics of stock car racing at the expense of those which are believed to be nationally shared.

Fourth, the track symbolically used “professionalism” as a symbol to differentiate City Speedway from other tracks. In the interview with the owner, he indicated that City Speedway had a more professionally run environment than many of the other short tracks in its state (interview, August 20, 2005). Symbolic of this professionalism was the presence of sophisticated racing technology (radio recording of lap times and certain track safety features), elements of the track which attracted families (primarily cleanliness and the family section) and accepted standards of

professionalism for drivers. He indicated that some other short tracks might have lower standards of professionalism that lead to smaller crowds and problems among drivers. This indicates that for the owner, professionalism symbolized that City Speedway provided a higher quality racing experience to spectators than other tracks.

Excluding general symbols of gender and age identity (such as “masculine” or “feminine” clothes, “age appropriate” dress, etc.), there was one symbol of identity shared by many spectators. Many fans came to the track wearing or carrying stock car racing related memorabilia (shirts, hats, coolers, jackets, seating cushions, etc.). Primarily, this racing memorabilia was related to a variety of specific NASCAR or local drivers. In some cases, racing memorabilia symbolized races at specific local tracks or at NEXTEL (or Winston) Cup races at the other major track in its state.

The variety of drivers displayed on memorabilia and the presence of some symbols of local racing identity seems to indicate that there is not one clear regional association among all fans. Wearing memorabilia of one NEXTEL cup driver does not necessarily indicate an association with the South since there are NEXTEL Cup drivers who originated outside the South. Wearing memorabilia referencing local tracks, races at MIS or local drivers indicates a possible connection to either local stock car racing or stock car racing in City Speedway’s state but not necessarily any symbolic connection to Southern or American identity.

In contrast to the cultural symbols that I observed at the track, there was distinct lack of “Southern” symbols that should be present if, as Alderman et al. (2002) argue, NASCAR represents the spread of “Southern values” beyond the “South.” First, there was lack of presence of confederate flags. Alderman et al.

(2002) have indicated that at most stock car racing events Confederate flags have been present. I only recorded one instance of a Confederate flag. This appeared on a baseball cap worn by a white, male who appeared to be in his late teens or early twenties. It is unclear why he was wearing such a hat or if this individual was actually from the “South.”

Second, there was a lack of presence of clothing or stock car racing memorabilia which specifically referenced the South (e.g. t-shirts of bands or entertainment associated with the “South,” NASCAR memorabilia emphasizing the Southern Origins of certain drivers or emphasizing “good old boy” attitudes). I saw only one instance of clothing that related a “Southern” message, two teenagers wearing “get r done” t-shirts that are associated with popular Southern comedian “Larry the Cableguy.” These two teenagers were associated with a special party on one of the decks for a local business. Because of this, it seems unlikely that they necessarily represented a wider association between other spectators and the South. Oftentimes, spectators on the “decks” would leave well before races were finished for the night.

Third, City Speedway occasionally played music during small gaps between races. With the exception of a country song about NASCAR and an excerpt of a Lynnard Skynnard song, the vast majority of this music was “non-Southern.” Songs played included Pocket Full of Kryptonite by the Spin Doctors, Fortunate Son by Creedence Clearwater Revival and numerous dance and pop songs that are generally played at other sporting events.

Fourth, there was a lack of stereotypical symbols of the South such as those associated with “working-class” Southerners by popular author MacGregor (2005). I would argue that stereotypical symbols of the “South” would include “white trash” aesthetics, hyper-masculinized symbols, sexualized women (“show your tits”) and extensive use of alcohol (see for example the humor of Larry the Cableguy that emphasizes these as “redneck” traits. It seems unlikely that Larry the Cableguy would become popular unless people believed that there was at least some truth in these stereotypes). I did not notice stereotypical “white trash” or “blue-collar” items such as dirty clothes, damaged and/or rusting cars, etc. There was a lack of hyper-masculinized symbols such as sexualized t-shirts, shirtless male fans (I only saw two), etc. Women at the track were not portrayed in a sexualized manner through use of sexual imagery, men “hitting on” women, sexual harassment, etc. In fact, when a visiting female driver for the winged-super sprints won a race for the very first time, the crowd responded with loud cheers with no visible negative reactions. Finally, while fans were allowed to bring alcohol to the track, most spectators did not bring it with them. In the non-family section in which I generally sat, there were at most seven or eight people drinking out of approximately one hundred to two-hundred fans in my general area. At no point during the races did any of these fans appear to be obviously intoxicated.

The lack of presence of Southern symbols of identity and a limited association with American identity seems to indicate that both Alderman et al.’s (2002), Pilsbury’s (1995 [1975], 1995[1989]) and Hurt’s (2005) views about the relationship between stock car racing and the South are wrong. If Alderman et al.’s view were

true that stock car racing represents the spread of “Southern” values outside the “South” then symbols of Southern identity should be present at City Speedway. If Pillsbury and Hurt’s views were true that stock car racing now represents the nationalization of stock car racing’s identity then there should be a more explicit symbolic association with American identity at City Speedway. Since neither of these symbolic associations occur and there is an emphasis on local stock car racing history, it seems unlikely that either of these views are correct. Instead, it seems likely that at many tracks, local identity and local stock car racing history is more important in understanding local racing “culture.”

CHAPTER 11

CONCLUSIONS

The Implications of the Case Study

The results of the case study at City Speedway show that the cultural relationship between stock car racing, NASCAR and/or the South is far more complex than that posited by most academics. Those fans with whom I interacted clearly differentiated between being a stock car fan and being a NASCAR fan. If the academic view was true that NASCAR is virtually synonymous with stock car racing then fans should not make this distinction. Instead they treat NASCAR as representative of NEXTEL Cup and in so doing consider NASCAR to be much like other sports leagues in the United States. Thus, for many fans of stock car racing, NASCAR is representative of a specific professional, stock car racing series but not all of stock car racing. This indicates that any academic examination must not assume that those who identify as NASCAR fans are fans of all stock car racing nor that any identities culturally associated with NASCAR are necessarily associated with stock car racing.

The local history of City Speedway holds great importance among many people involved in stock car racing at the speedway. First, City Speedway “officially” emphasizes its history as a form of marketing. Second, the owner of the track raced in the past and multigenerational families of drivers have been racing at City Speedway for many years. Finally, local fans relate their identity as fans to City Speedway’s past. These associations with the past privilege local history at the expense of historical narratives that relate stock car racing to a “Southern” or a

(generic) American identity. This indicates that outside the South, people's identities as stock car fans might be tied more closely to the "local" presence of stock car racing than to national or regional identities.

Finally, cultural symbols present at City Speedway did not indicate a particularly strong association between local stock car racing and the "South." First, the dominant "official" symbols of American and religious identity were not particularly unique to City Speedway while the dominant "official" symbols of local history and professionalism were primarily used to emphasize the uniqueness of City Speedway. Second, the symbols of stock car racing fandom displayed by spectators were not clearly associated with a specific regional identity. Finally, there was a lack of symbols clearly associated with Southern identity. This presence of certain symbols emphasizing local uniqueness and the lack of Southern symbols indicates that at City Speedway, there was not a particularly strong association between stock car racing and Southern or American identity.

In addition, the general makeup of the crowd was far more diverse than academic examinations of stock car racing would seem to indicate. The crowd did not just contain white, working-class, males which supposedly represent "true" stock car fans or drivers. Instead, the crowd was extremely diverse and contained individuals that represented many age, gender and racial categories. The interactions among these fans was fragmentary and intermittent and fan behavior was extremely variable. This seems to indicate that there is not necessarily one factor that links all stock car racing in all instances.

Since there has been a continuous presence of stock car racing at numerous tracks outside of the South, it seems likely that the cultural relationship between local racing history at City Speedway and fans may exist at other tracks in “non-Southern” areas. A continuous presence of stock car racing at certain tracks would seem to indicate that there might be a long term presence of fans and drivers at a given track. Since tracks must continuously attract spectators to their races for economic survival, there must be a continuous presence of fans at a given track. A cultural emphasis on local stock car racing history might provide a way through which fans can relate to a given local track. This would indicate that there might be a multi-generational presence of fans at any given track and as a result, an emphasis on the importance of the local at the expense of the national or regional.

Final Conclusions

As the case study and historical evidence show, the academic thesis that stock car racing is a “Southern tradition” does not represent the reality of stock car racing’s history or the local experiences of all stock car racing fans. There is a history of stock car racing outside of the South that is as deep as the history of stock car racing within the South. While there may be wider cultural associations between stock car racing and the South, it clear that in some areas outside of the South, local stock car racing history is far more important to many fans than “Southern” stock car racing history. This seems to indicate that the “South” does not have an exclusive claim to stock car’s history, culture or values.

Since all traditions are representative of present cultural understandings of the past, stock car racing is in actuality a “contextual tradition”, a practice that is labeled

tradition because of specific historical and cultural circumstances. By assuming that NASCAR's dominant position in the present represents its dominance of stock car racing in the past, the majority of academics project their present understandings of NASCAR into the past. This may be partly due to wider cultural associations between stock car racing and the American "South" as seen in the "NASCAR dads" debate and popular literature. In essence, many academics are implicitly assuming that present cultural understandings of stock car racing's history and stock car racing fans represent what stock car racing was actually like in the past.

Stock car racing has never had a period during its entire history when one could say that it has remained stable. Throughout its history, stock car racing has been continuously changing. This indicates that the phenomenon of stock car racing is far more complicated than most academic examinations would imply. Stock car racing is a diverse sport which like all social phenomenon is affected by specific cultural and historical contexts. By reducing stock car racing to a "Southern tradition" (or dying "Southern tradition") academics ignore this complexity and oversimplify how fans relate to stock car racing.

Areas of Future Research

In the future academics need to take into account the complexity of stock car racing's history and its current cultural context. More research needs to be done on this topic in order to fully document the complex relationship between stock car racing fans and the local and/or regional history of stock car racing. A more extensive anthropological examination of stock car racing would allow one to move beyond the older understandings of "tradition" employed by geographers and

historians. This research could document the diverse ways in which fans might relate to stock car racing and its local history and might possibly lead to a richer understanding of stock car fandom and possibly, sports fandom in general. As a result, anthropologists might gain answers to wider anthropological questions about the nature of tradition, history and possibly personal identity.

One possible area of research that needs to be pursued is the comparative study of stock car racing fans in the “South” and those outside the “South.” While there are wider cultural understandings of a relationship between stock car racing and the “South”, it is unclear whether or not the majority of Southern stock car fans actually believe that stock car racing is a “Southern” tradition. Since NASCAR is currently the dominant racing organizing body in the United States, it is possible that there may be a stronger association between NASCAR and stock car racing at other tracks than at City Speedway. A comparative examination of stock car racing fans would help determine how present understandings of history relate to various regional identities and the local history of stock car racing at various tracks. This would provide a richer picture of the diversity that exists among contemporary stock car racing fans.

Finally, the “contextual tradition” perspective needs to be applied to previous anthropological and historical examinations of “invented traditions.” By using the “contextual tradition” perspective both anthropologists and historians can avoid the problematic conflation of “invention” with “fabrication”. In doing so, anthropologists can engage in a richer analysis of the complex ways through which practices become

labeled traditions. In doing so, they can avoid the problems of past analyses of traditions without creating new problems in the future.

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APPENDIX

HSIRB approval letter on file in the Graduate College.