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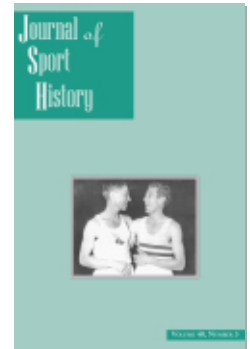
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## **The Kentucky Derby; How the Run for the Roses Became America's Premier Sporting Event by James C Nicholson (review)**

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the track and lead their rider for several laps until a new team took over. Soon technology introduced motorized bicycles that made the other pacers obsolete, putting many skilled, powerful bicycle riders out of business. Thousands of spectators came to see the champions break records or sometimes break their necks in spectacular crashes.

To reprise the opening paragraph, while the individual chapters are interesting, the book lacks a coherent thesis. It is not a biography of Choppy Warburton as much as it is a collection of chapters detailing discrete aspects of early bicycle racing, all with interesting photographs of Choppy, his racers, and the Simpson Lever Chain. While they are individually interesting, nothing holds them together. For those interested in a book about Warburton, there are other, though dated, biographies. There are also other, more comprehensive histories of early bicycle racing.

—DUNCAN R. JAMIESON  
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NICHOLSON, JAMES C. *The Kentucky Derby; How the Run for the Roses Became America's Premier Sporting Event*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2012. Pp. xx+274. Illustrations, index, and bibliography. \$24.95 pb.

Horseracing books tend to be puff pieces for the industry: hagiographic biographies of famous racehorses; betting schemes and systems; biographies of jockeys; coffee table photography books of scenic racetracks and horses; memoirs and autobiographies of jockeys, owners, and trainers; and the occasional scholarly history of some aspect of racing plus many books about the Kentucky Derby sprinkled in among all of the above approaches. James C. Nicholson has produced a semi-scholarly, yet popularly accessible book about the Kentucky Derby within the context of the cultural, political, and historical significance of the horse race.

By marketing the idea of Kentucky as a Deep South state with Confederate heritage to celebrate, the Derby connections seek to tie the race to tradition and history while the commonwealth in reality was a border state which sent almost an equal number of soldiers to the Union Army as well as to the Confederate side during the American Civil War. Because the race boosted the local economy as Derby Day expanded into Derby Week, politicians protected it during lean times (the Depression, World War II), while the promoters, particularly Matt Winn, trumpeted it as “the” race to win and Churchill Downs as “the” place to be seen—an international social event in the clubhouse while being an uninhibited festival on the infield.

While Nicholson cogently argues that the Derby is a celebration of place and American society, his approach to the subject is tediously repetitious. In chapter after chapter, he repeats and reiterates the link between Kentucky and Old South imagery, the notion of Southern hospitality, and the Kentucky Derby as a celebration of the present and the past. Without all the repetitive filler, this would have made a substantial journal article.

James Nicholson may be a newly-minted Ph.D., but either his professors failed to teach him how to do research with primary sources or he did not follow through for his



first book. Aside from using one oral history interview with Gov. Louie B. Nunn from the University of Kentucky Special Collections' Louie B. Nunn Oral History Project, Nicholson does not consult primary source materials. The closest he gets are contemporaneous newspaper accounts, which tend to be wild exaggerations of actual facts in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and a handful of jockey and trainer co-written autobiographies. He provides no citation for information on Mark Allen's friendship with Chip Woolley after a bar fight (p. 214). He misspells the first names of two prominent music business racehorse owners, Bert (instead of Burt) Bacharach and Barry (instead of Berry) Gordy (p. 179), and sports historian Steven A. Riess whom Nicholson calls Reiss (p. 245n24).

For one whose family is active in the thoroughbred industry, Nicholson's lack of initiative in seeking out interviews with folks connected to the Kentucky Derby, or ferreting out personal, family, and business papers in private hands is a disappointing missed opportunity. While he touches on the Civil Rights movement and Derby Day as a grand stage for protests, he fails to delve more deeply into the impact of the "mint juleps, magnolias, and darkies at play in My Old Kentucky Home" imagery on the African-American track workers. There is a whole other level to be explored on the significance and persistence of the Kentucky Derby. In racing parlance, Nicholson does not dig in and grab the track; he just skips across the surface tiring out before the finish. This book had so much potential, but Nicholson wasted his efforts in repetition when he could have expanded the threads into a full-blown tapestry.

—SUSAN HAMBURGER

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PHILLIPS, TOM. *Bicycles: Vintage People on Photo Postcards*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011. Pp. 112. Photographs. \$25.00 cb.

Postcards first appeared in mid nineteenth-century Anglo-American society, around the same time as two technological revolutions—photography and bicycles. Prior to this time, communicating with friends or family at a distance was a difficult and usually expensive proposition. Communicating an image of a loved one was virtually impossible to all but the very well to do. Soon, these three novelties combined to offer virtually anyone the opportunity to show off his or her skills with the world's most efficient form of personal transportation. Like photography, bicycles evolved from early, clumsy prototypes until they reached a form still in use today. The Starley diamond frame bicycle equipped with a rear wheel chain drive has continued to be the basic style for the last one hundred twenty years. People used bicycles to travel, to tour, to commute, to deliver, to race and perhaps first and foremost to enjoy the freedom and independence previously unavailable to the average individual. As industrialization allowed people more leisure time the bicycle became a means to fill those hours with healthy exercise out of doors. Combined with photography and the post, individuals and groups could now share this joy with others. As William Fotheringham's "Foreword" clearly states, this joy is timeless; the photo postcards