

Summer 2021

Charlotte's Glory Road: The History of NASCAR in the Queen City

Hannah Thompson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd>



Part of the [Public History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Thompson, H.(2021). *Charlotte's Glory Road: The History of NASCAR in the Queen City*. (Master's thesis). Retrieved from <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd/6539>

This Open Access Thesis is brought to you by Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact digres@mailbox.sc.edu.

Charlotte's Glory Road:
The History of NASCAR in the Queen City

by

Hannah Thompson

Bachelor of Arts
Clemson University, 2018

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts in

Public History

College of Arts and Sciences

University of South Carolina

2021

Accepted by:

Gabrielle Kuenzli, Director of Thesis

Kent Germany, Reader

Tracey L. Weldon, Interim Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

© Copyright by Hannah Thompson, 2021
All Rights Reserved.

DEDICATION

To my Paw-paw, Andy Thompson, without whom I would not have started out on this project. To my parents, Rachael and Drew, who were always by my side. To my friends, Caitlin, Holly, Becky, and Henry, who always had my back and read countless drafts. To Key Lime, my cat, who made it extremely difficult to type at times and forced me to take breaks. Last, but certainly not least, I dedicate this work to ThriftBooks, without which I would never have been able to access enough NASCAR books without resorting to moonshining myself.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dan Simone at the NASCAR Hall of Fame, who was a great mentor to me while writing this work and connected me with vital resources; Suzanne Wise at the Appalachian State University archives, who helped me immensely finding unique sources; and Dan Bradfield at the Orange County Regional History Center in Orlando for discussing research avenues and letting me take time off to finish this thesis. At UofSC, I thank Tom Brown for encouraging me to look after my mental health above all, and Gabi Kuenzli and Kent Germany for acting as advisors.

ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the relationship between the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) and Charlotte, North Carolina, and how the geography of the Charlotte area was a catalyst to the growth of the motorsports industry in the Queen City. Specifically, this thesis investigates the roles of NASCAR teams, over 90 percent of whom are located in the Charlotte area; Charlotte Motor Speedway; and the NASCAR Hall of Fame in creating and continuing to grow the presence of NASCAR in Charlotte. The Hall of Fame in particular has strengthened the position of Charlotte in NASCAR history, after officials selected Charlotte over Daytona and Atlanta for the site of the Hall. Additionally, I contend that NASCAR historians have generally overlooked the prominent role of Charlotte in NASCAR history, and seek to remedy this oversight.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
Abstract	v
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Moonshine: A Ticket to Freedom	10
Chapter 2: NASCAR Enters Charlotte	13
Chapter 3: Geographical Advantages and Racetracks	27
Chapter 4: NASCAR's Teams	35
Chapter 5: Charlotte's Glory Road	39
Chapter 6: By the Numbers.....	53
Conclusion	61

INTRODUCTION

It was race day in 1960. The newly built Charlotte Motor Speedway was beginning to spring to life. Andrew “Andy” Thompson made his way to the pits with his paint cart in tow. He was there to paint the drivers’ names and sponsorships onto their stock cars. As a sign painter for Coca-Cola Consolidated in Charlotte, North Carolina, by trade, Thompson entered the automobile racing circuit as both an artist and a race fan. As his reputation grew at the track, so did the number of cars he lettered on race day. Bobby Isaac, Buck and Buddy Baker, Fireball Roberts, and Wendell Scott were all names intimately familiar to Thompson, as his personal photos and accounts document.¹ Thompson’s artistry was only one of many ties NASCAR had to the city of Charlotte, North Carolina, and his legacy of painting race cars continues to live on through those cars on display in the “Glory Road” exhibit at the NASCAR Hall of Fame located in the Queen City.²

Thompson was one of the thousands of people in the Charlotte area who helped establish the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) – and whose lives anchored the sport in the city that would become home to its Hall of Fame a half-century later. Despite its role in the development of Charlotte and in the lives of

¹ Andy Thompson, in conversation with author, 2005-2017.

² “The Queen City” is an alternative name for Charlotte, stemming from the origin of the city’s name, Queen Charlotte, who was the Queen of England and wife to King George III in 1786 when the city was founded under Governor Tryon. Additionally, some of the cars found in the “Glory Road” exhibit at the Hall of Fame were lettered by Thompson, according to his accounts.

individuals like Thompson, NASCAR has attracted surprisingly limited attention from academic historians. Most of the literature written about the sport focuses on its origins from bootlegging, the illegal production, distribution, and sale of alcohol, during the Prohibition Era, or early organized racing efforts. In contrast, there is little scholarship that examines the relationship between Charlotte and NASCAR, with only local historians such as Tom Hanchett or Heather A. Smith even briefly investigating the relationship. Hanchett in particular chooses to focus more on relationships between varying communities within the Charlotte region, especially marginalized communities. In turn, Smith analyzes the geography of Charlotte and how the city became a metropolitan area, evolving from a mining town to a textile mill town to an international banking city.³ This lack of scholarship and attention to NASCAR within Charlotte is due, at least in part, to the simple fact the historians, other than sports historians such as Dan Pierce and Mark Howell, often marginalize sports history as a pop culture past time rather than a rigorous academic discipline.

There have only been a handful of conclusive scholarly pieces written on the history of NASCAR, and of them two are from professors in North Carolina. Daniel S. Pierce is the most notable of these NASCAR historians. Pierce is a professor of southern history at the University of North Carolina Asheville, where he specializes in Appalachian history, NASCAR history, and race relations in the South. Of his

³ Tom Hanchett, "The History of Charlotte," Charlotte, City of Charlotte, accessed August 30, 2020. <https://www.charlottesgotalot.com/articles/history/the-history-of-charlotte>.; Heather A. Smith and William Graves, "Introduction. From Mill Town to Financial Capital: Charlotte's Global Evolution," in *Charlotte, NC: The Global Evolution of a New South City*, ed. Heather A. Smith and William Graves, 1-9 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 1-2.

publications, his 2010 book *Real NASCAR: White Lightning, Red Clay, and Big Bill France* is the most notable and cements his status as a prominent NASCAR historian. *Real NASCAR* asserts that auto racing did stem from illegal races among bootleggers and provides infallible proof that this is the case. For several years, historians debated whether or not NASCAR could be directly linked with bootlegging, with the France family and NASCAR contending that bootlegging had little to do with the early years of auto racing. Additionally, the narrative places the early years of NASCAR in a broader context of American history by exploring how automobile racing grew from a regional sport to a larger national pastime, and by further asserting that auto racing really started as a pastime for working-class white men. Pierce also examines William “Big Bill” France, the founder of NASCAR, and how vital France’s role was in the 1930s and 1940s in order to grow NASCAR into what it is today. Such a study, especially solidifying the role of bootlegging in automobile racing in order to clarify the sport’s origins and the place of bootleggers within the sport, is instrumental to the successful facilitation of conversation on NASCAR. Pierce’s narrative therefore provides a basis for this thesis and any future research NASCAR historians may conduct.

While Pierce is at the forefront of NASCAR historians, he built off foundations laid by two other men, Mark D. Howell, a professor of communications at Northwestern Michigan College, in 1997 and Pete Daniel, former president of the Organization of American Historians and author of *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s*, in 2000. Howell’s publication laid the groundwork for Pierce’s research, and it proved definitively that there was indeed a link between bootlegging and NASCAR’s origins, though not to the degree Pierce proved. Likewise, Pete Daniel has a chapter in *Lost Revolutions* on

NASCAR and its popularity amongst working-class “lowdowns” as a southern sport.⁴ While Daniel, Howell, and Pierce are premier NASCAR historians and created the basis for many other scholarly pieces, none of the three scholars discuss the relationship between Charlotte and NASCAR at any length other than to note that the first Strictly Stock race ran in the city or that over 90 percent of teams are located around the Queen City.

By examining the NASCAR teams, Charlotte Motor Speedway, and the NASCAR Hall of Fame, the larger social and cultural implications of automobile racing within Charlotte during the mid- to late 1900s will become apparent, as will the importance of Charlotte in motorsports history. Charlotte’s geography was a significant factor in the Queen City becoming a major racing hub, both through its positioning in the United States and through the abundant red clay in the Piedmont area. This geography factor in combination with Charlotte’s growing economic and cultural standing throughout the second half of the twentieth century led to NASCAR adopting Charlotte as an unofficial racing hub by 1965, as well as NASCAR executives eventually choosing Charlotte to house the NASCAR Hall of Fame in the early 2000s, solidifying the role of Charlotte in racing and NASCAR history. The NASCAR Hall of Fame’s position alone testifies to Charlotte’s impact on the racing industry and the racing industry’s effect on

⁴ “Lowdown” is the term for working-class Southerners used by NASCAR historian Pete Daniel. Daniel contends that “lowdown” takes the place of other somewhat derogatory terms such as “Redneck,” “hillbilly,” or “white trash,” and that the working-class population took pride in their status at the bottom of the proverbial food chain. Members of the “lowdown” population include mill or factory workers, farmers, and general laborers. The term is specific to the Southeast due to NASCAR’s start in the region, specifically in the Piedmont region; NASCAR did not spread to other parts of the country until the mid-late-1900s. Pete Daniel, “Fast and Furious” in *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute, 2000), 91.

Charlotte, as the Queen City itself, headed by Mayor Pat McCrory, was the group lobbying the hardest for the Hall's seat in Charlotte. The Hall in Charlotte is the only hall of fame completely devoted to and licensed by NASCAR; other halls of fame devote themselves to motorsports in general, though they may discuss NASCAR. Additionally, the NASCAR Hall of Fame is the only hall of fame located in the Queen City, further speaking to the importance of the motorsports industry to Charlotte. I also contend that motorsports historians have overlooked Charlotte's significant role in NASCAR history, despite their acknowledgement that at least 90 percent of NASCAR teams are located in Charlotte as well as the red clay that made early racing possible, which has been a complete oversight on the part of sports historians.

The term "Charlotte" in this thesis refers to the greater Charlotte area, which consists of the cities of Charlotte, Concord, Statesville, Mooresville, Harrisburg, and Huntersville.⁵ This thesis focuses on the greater Charlotte area because Concord and Mooresville are critical to the NASCAR narrative. Mooresville is home to a large portion of race teams, both historically and in modern times. Concord is home to NASCAR's Research and Development Center as well as Charlotte Motor Speedway and its accompanying facilities.⁶ Charlotte was originally much smaller than it is now, naturally, with great evolution occurring within the city over the last two and a half centuries.

A charter decreed by King George III of Britain established Charlotte in 1768. After European settlement, locals discovered gold in the area in 1799, and gold quickly

⁵ Larry Cothren, "Charlotte's Place in Motorsports," *Stock Car Racing* 42, no. 4, Stock Car Racing Collection, Appalachian State University Libraries Special Collections Research Center, Boone, North Carolina (April 2007): 8.

⁶ Cothren, "Charlotte's Place in Motorsports," 8.

became the major export for the city with Charlotte as the center of gold production for the country until the California gold rush in the mid-1800s.⁷ By the time of the Civil War, Charlotte was a major transportation hub due to its railroad expansion. The city's population doubled in the 1860s and continued to grow after emancipation as the processes of urbanization and industrialization eventually turned cotton fields into a metropolis.⁸ The rapid growth and industrialization of the Queen City led to Charlotte holding the very first Strictly Stock race for NASCAR, making the city an instrumental part to NASCAR's narrative.

Charlotte became a globalizing city, a city with significant competitive advantages and which acts as a hub within the global economy, during the second half of the twentieth century despite what historians Heather Smith and William Graves have called "its regional disadvantages" such as "unexceptional" location (lack of mountain passes or waterways), "cultural baggage" (such as slavery or Jim Crow), low wage economic history (Charlotte is known for its large number of low-skill, low-wage workers, especially in the first half of the twentieth century), and maintaining its place in the state's political periphery (only one mayor of Charlotte, Pat McCrory, has subsequently become the governor of North Carolina, and one mayor, Anthony Foxx, has taken a federal position under Obama's second administration).⁹ While these particular points are commonly claimed by regional historians in the past, Smith and Graves' edited

⁷ "Charlotte," Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Charlotte-North-Carolina>.

⁸ Hanchett, "The History of Charlotte."

⁹ "Global City," Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/global-city>.; Smith and Graves, "Introduction," 1-2.; Eric Frazier, "Will Charlotte's next leader be able to bridge a growing divide?," *The Charlotte Observer*, *The Charlotte Observer Archives* (May 19, 2013), 16A.

volume assists in disproving such claims, for instance when the editors note that Charlotte is now considered a “rising immigrant gateway,” especially for the Latino population, by the city’s leadership, as well as that Charlotte now makes up almost an entire county (Mecklenburg County) in the state and that it is a huge economic influencer in the state.¹⁰ Additionally, the editors note that NASCAR has a large influence on Charlotte’s “extraregional reach and growing global appeal” by drawing visitors to the city as well as by making the city more visible in the global market place through unique industries and companies like Holman-Moody.¹¹ Its “regional disadvantages” will be disproved in Chapter 3 of this thesis, especially how Charlotte is a central economic hub. It is difficult for regional historians to say that Charlotte has “cultural baggage” when the same can be said of any city in the country and especially in the Southeast, and which Smith and Graves attempt to disprove through their edited volume. Additionally, Charlotte’s heritage is the South’s heritage; therefore, there is no difference between the specific “cultural baggage” of racial and socio-economic divisions that the editors are referencing between a city like Charlotte and a city like Atlanta, which the editors noted *was* a global marketplace.¹² Has Charlotte remained in the state’s political periphery? According to the *Charlotte Observer*, for the most part, yes, due to very few city officials moving on to more prominent positions (for instance with McCrory and Foxx taking state and federal positions, respectively), but this is a small price to pay when the city is known for being an economic giant for the state. Additionally, thriving industries, like the

¹⁰ Smith and Graves, “Introduction,” 1, 4.

¹¹ Smith and Graves, “Introduction,” 2.

¹² Smith and Graves, “Introduction,” 2.

motorsports or banking industries created in Charlotte beginning in the 1950s, have offset Charlotte's low wage economic history as a mining and mill town.

Charlotte's role as a financial center was one of the major factors that helped catapult the city to its position as a globalizing city with distinct economic advantages. By the 1980s Charlotte was one of the largest banking cities in the nation. In 1998, the Bank of America relocated its headquarters to Charlotte, creating the nation's first coast-to-coast banking operation.¹³ Additionally, the Bank of America continued to buy out smaller regional banks and became the third largest bank in the world after expanding into Europe and Asia.¹⁴ Because of this rapid growth, Charlotte had greater diversity in businesses, and it could foster more and larger industries.

A number of companies started in the Charlotte area in the mid-1900s, swelling locals with pride. These companies include Duke Electric, Belk, Harris Teeter, Family Dollar, Bojangle's, Lowe's Home Improvement, Cheerwine, Krispy Kreme, Cook Out, and Lance (Snyder's-Lance) crackers.¹⁵ Charlotte is also home to WBT, the first licensed radio station in the South with its inaugural day on air in March 1922. Notably, it was the radio station that aired live race coverage for Charlotte Motor Speedway through its earlier years, though it is unclear when other radio stations began to broadcast coverage as well.¹⁶ Additionally, Charlotte became home to the Charlotte Hornets professional

¹³ Smith and Graves, "Introduction," 1-2.

¹⁴ Ronald L. Mitchelson and Derek H. Alderman, "Red Dust and Dynamometers: Charlotte as Memory and Knowledge Community in NASCAR," in *Charlotte, NC: The Global Evolution of a New South City*, ed. William Graves and Heather A. Smith (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 43.

¹⁵ Hanchett, "The History of Charlotte."

¹⁶ Hanchett, "The History of Charlotte."; Deb Williams, *Charlotte Motor Speedway: Images of Modern America* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2017), 13.; Emily Jack,

basketball team, Carolina Panthers professional football team, the Charlotte Checkers minor league hockey team, and the Charlotte Knights minor league baseball team by the early 2000s, long after NASCAR was well established in the city. For perspective, the Knights became the first sport to enter Charlotte in 1976 and the Hornets were the first professional team to enter the city in 1988 since NASCAR ran its first race in 1949.¹⁷ When NASCAR is compared with these other sports teams through various sources, especially articles from *The Charlotte Observer* as well as financial reports, it becomes apparent that the impact of NASCAR and the motorsports industry has been more significant than the other sports due to its economic impact and spread over the geographical region of the Charlotte area, further discussed in Chapter 6 of this thesis, though the general public may not attribute such wealth to a generally working-class sport. However, it is first critical to discuss the importance of bootlegging and moonshine to the creation and prominence of NASCAR in the Southeastern United States, despite NASCAR's refutations of this fact, in order to understand NASCAR's founding principles and why NASCAR continually struggles to gain a foothold amongst middle- and upper-class populations.

“WBT Charlotte in the Golden Age of Radio,” Ncpedia, <https://www.ncpedia.org/anchor/wbt-charlotte-golden-age>.

¹⁷ Smith and Graves, “Introduction,” 1-2.

CHAPTER 1

MOONSHINE: A TICKET TO FREEDOM

It is critical to establish the connection between NASCAR and bootlegging because all three NASCAR historians previously discussed, Pierce, Daniel, and Howell, consider the implications of such a connection, and because the illicit moonshine business directly caused early automobile racing efforts. The connection between bootlegging and NASCAR also sheds light on why the sport attracts more of the working-class population. While bootlegging is a general term meaning the illegal production, sale, or distribution of some product, the bootlegging I refer to in this thesis is specifically in reference to moonshine; moonshine, also known as white lightning, is a type of white liquor made from corn in a still. It is whiskey that is not aged, thus keeping its clear color. While moonshine and bootlegging are by no means exclusive to the 1900s, the 1920s and 1930s saw increased popularity of moonshine due to the introduction of Prohibition in the United States. Bootlegging was a form of life for some moonshiners, especially in the 1930s with the Great Depression. Illegal liquor was a sure way of making money when jobs were scarce, and bootleggers had to prepare to evade any local or federal law enforcement officers who may try to take away their form of income. Bootleggers did this by modifying their automobiles to outrun the typical stock automobiles that law enforcement utilized. The taxation of homemade moonshine as

early as the late 1700s made bootleggers upset, and they protested in the only way they knew how: by running it illegally.¹⁸

Because many of the lower working-class involved with bootlegging already possessed modified cars in order to outrun law enforcement, the working-class bootleggers raced each other in their free time, creating a new form of entertainment specific to the working-class population. Popularity in illegal racing grew throughout the mid-1900s, resulting in more organized and often legal racing and eventually emanating in NASCAR, though NASCAR officials attempt to suppress the idea that moonshine had a significant hand in creating the sport supposedly to give NASCAR a more respectable history. However, Pierce notes that there was considerable involvement in bootlegging enterprises amongst drivers, mechanics, track owners, and promoters alike. Additionally, cultural aspects of moonshining, such as the excitement of evading the law, coupled with traditional Southern, lower-class, white male views of sports and leisure – needing violence, intense competition, and high activity – led to stock car racing which offered all of the characteristics that the working-class population saw as defining Southern manhood.¹⁹

The automobile was also a “ticket out of a life that ‘seemed stunting and isolated,’” for those in the lower working-class, making automobiles more of a necessity for their livelihood, and which assisted in work on farms as well as with bootlegging

¹⁸ Mark D. Howell, *From Moonshine to Madison Avenue: A Cultural History of the NASCAR Winston Cup Series* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1997), 119-21.

¹⁹ Daniel S. Pierce, *Real NASCAR: White Lightning, Red Clay, and Big Bill France* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 21.

moonshine.²⁰ Because of the high demand of automobiles by this particular population, more working-class white men knew how to drive. Due to the increased number of cars and drivers, more working-class white men also became intimately familiar with how to fix these automobiles, and Southerners began referring to these men as “shade-tree” mechanics – a staple for southern rural communities that has remained a regional figure throughout the years.²¹ Both the drivers and “shade-tree” mechanics were critical to the start of stock car racing, as well as to the start of NASCAR.

²⁰ Pierce, *Real NASCAR*, 24.

²¹ The term “shade-tree” mechanic comes from the idea that these mechanics were working out of a place other than a professional garage, likely under the shade of a tree in order to escape the hot southern sun. Pierce, *Real NASCAR*, 25.

CHAPTER 2

NASCAR ENTERS CHARLOTTE

Officially created in December 1947, NASCAR initiated its first “Strictly Stock” race at Charlotte Fairgrounds Speedway, which closed in the 1950s and became like a junkyard.²² Strictly Stock races ran with stock cars, which were cars that came straight from the manufacturer instead of teams modifying them by substituting special parts to make the cars run faster.²³ Initially, smaller races amongst the working-class population on dirt tracks ran mostly between mechanics to see who could build a better car.²⁴ The races that had started as a battle of mechanics began to turn into a battle of drivers. Because NASCAR restricted the car parts teams could use, the driver had to know how to drift, or slide, around the corners, when to brake or speed up, and when the most opportune time was to take a pit stop and refuel in order to beat out the competition. Before NASCAR, drivers throughout the southeast challenged each other in illegal backroad races and on dirt tracks scratched out of farmers’ fields throughout the southeast, driving cars modified by shade-tree mechanics. They were the “lowdowns;”

²² The name is somewhat contested, as another source lists it as Southern States Fairground. Howell, *From Moonshine to Madison Avenue*, 23.; “NASCAR History,” NASCAR, accessed August 30, 2020. <https://www.nascar.com/nascar-history/>; John Close, “Metrolina Speedway Only Historic Charlotte Track to Still Survive,” *Racing Nation* (January 16, 2012), <https://racingnation.com/metrolina-speedway-only-historic-charlotte-track-to-still-survive/>.

²³ Over the years, the term “stock car” has shifted to indicate a car that is specifically modified in some way for racing.

²⁴ Daniel, “Fast and Furious,” 95.

this particular population of Southern working-class white men was the key factor to stock car racing as they were able to reclaim their “wildness” and freedom away from employers and the society that looked down on them for their rough appearances and rowdy ways.²⁵ Historian Pete Daniel, who coined the term “lowdowns,” admits the term is ambivalent, “edged with pride and denigration,” and notes the pride the working-class took in their “lowdown” status, though he also claims that such attitudes caused larger problems, especially in reference to racial segregation.²⁶ “Lowdowns” has a negative connotation to the outside reader, and it does nothing to help the popular American view that auto racing is unsophisticated or only for those members of the lower working-class. Daniel would have made his point just as eloquently and without potentially offending anyone had he used a phrase like “the working-class population,” which he tends to use instead of “lowdown” anyway and begs the question of why he would introduce the phrase in the first place. Such usage indicated that Daniel is somewhat biased against the lower-working class even if only subconsciously, as he also defends such a term as a better alternative to others that might have taken its place, such as “Redneck, woolhat, hillbilly...and white trash.”²⁷ This phrase is also problematic because Charlotte officials were striving to create a more sophisticated city than the mining and textile mill town it had initially been by the 1960s. Additionally, NASCAR was attempting to present itself as a serious sport and not just as a pastime for the southern working-class. In both cases, “lowdown” presents the idea of NASCAR and Charlotte as having a dirty and uneducated population and is the reason why I use the term “working-class population” in this thesis.

²⁵ Daniel, “Fast and Furious,” 91-3, 96.

²⁶ Daniel, “Fast and Furious,” 91-2.

²⁷ Daniel, “Fast and Furious,” 91.

As NASCAR's audience and popularity increased, the resulting growth in commercialism and race promoters led to larger venues, more rules, and racing moving from the backroads into town. Race promoters were the so-called bosses, organizing races, paying the winners, and overseeing the marketing of the races to the public among other duties. Those who could not or did not want to drive in the races but wanted to be involved with the sport typically became race promoters. William "Big Bill" France was one such promoter.

Born in 1909 in Washington, DC, France moved to Daytona Beach, Florida, in 1935. Through his ownership of a service station, he became a central figure in the local racing circuit in Daytona Beach.²⁸ Frustrated with his continual losses to Atlanta bootleggers, men who had definitively more practice driving and racing in their moonshining days than France had as a business owner, France became a promoter for the races instead, though he would continue to rely on the participation of bootleggers such as Curtis Turner in his own races.²⁹ Bootlegger participation fueled larger crowds, which were critical to generate more revenue and produce larger winnings for drivers. By becoming a race promoter, France gained the experience necessary to create and lead the organization that became known as NASCAR. His position as a race promoter also helped him network enough to attract a substantial crowd willing to take part in his races. Additionally, he hosted and promoted races wherever he wanted, which would not be in Atlanta.

²⁸ Daniel, "Fast and Furious," 97.

²⁹ Mitchelson and Alderman, "Red Dust and Dynamometers," 55.

France's frustration with Atlanta's leaders was much greater than his frustration with bootleggers, one of the major reasons why NASCAR did not establish a racing hub in the Georgia city. As a city in the Piedmont region of the United States, Atlanta has red clay, the same as Charlotte, which is perfect for racing, and was much larger than Charlotte in terms of metropolitan area. What, then, went wrong? Atlanta had a large population of bootleggers from the 1920s until after World War II. Since Atlanta law enforcement imprisoned many of the bootleggers several times, they were ineligible for the draft and did not serve in the military, or they somehow managed to evade the draft.³⁰ Because of this, the bootleggers continued to hold illegal drag races during wartime in order to express themselves, to express their traditional cultural values of maleness, and as a form of hard to come by fun, which displeased city officials and religious leaders. Atlanta produced more of the highly influential car owners, mechanics, and drivers than anywhere else in the nation during the first half of the twentieth century, making the city's subsequent actions that much more detrimental to Atlanta's future in NASCAR due to the high concentration of bootlegging efforts in the early and mid-1900s.³¹

The city of Atlanta owned the popular Lakewood Park fairgrounds which boasted a one-mile dirt track for racing. Lakewood announced that it would host a stock car race Labor Day weekend of 1945, the first following the war, making the race a monumental one as well as drawing in larger crowds of fans for some much-needed fun. Local civic and religious leaders were adamant that those bootleggers with long criminal records

³⁰ Dan Pierce, "What is your Racket, Brother?": Bootleggers, Respectable Atlanta, Bill France, and the Birth of NASCAR," in *Motorsports and American Culture: From Demolition Derbies to NASCAR*, ed. Mark D. Howell and John D. Miller (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 90.

³¹ Pierce, "What is your Racket, Brother?," 87.

would not race, as the bootleggers did not present the sort of image officials wanted associated with the city, though the bootleggers ultimately raced that day after fans placed pressure on track leadership to allow the bootleggers to race. This controversy led to an official crackdown on who could or could not race in city-sanctioned races, and Atlanta ultimately lost its opportunity as a racing hub and as the eventual home to the NASCAR Hall of Fame because the city had banned some of the most popular drivers.³² Since the bootleggers could not race in Atlanta, they moved up to Charlotte, where a majority of teams eventually settled following the Lakewood controversy, and where the city welcomed bootleggers with, mostly, open arms due to Charlotte's status as a mill town in the late 1940s and early 1950s and its majority working-class population.

Charlotte city leaders were not yet concerned about the city's image as a refined metropolitan area inhabited by middle- and upper-class residents and the main form of media for the city, *The Charlotte Observer*, was supportive of NASCAR's move to the Queen City. Because of the complicated history between NASCAR and Atlanta as well as what Atlanta considered the rising issue of the working-class population, the racing scene took what Pierce called a "dramatic northern shift of the center of the Piedmont stock car racing universe, from Atlanta to the Carolinas and southern Virginia," drastically and negatively affecting the continuing relationship between NASCAR and Atlanta.³³

After World War II and following the debacle at Lakewood Park's raceway, France and thirty-six other men got together and decided to create a new racing league,

³² Pierce, "What is your Racket, Brother?," 93-4.

³³ Pierce, "What is your Racket, Brother?," 94.

one of five at the time, that would compete nationally. The impetus for this new racing league was based on France and his cohort's realization that they needed a more organized form of racing with a formal set of rules that were the same at every track across the nation. The cohort called the organization the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing, or NASCAR for short, and only allowed American-made cars.³⁴ By only allowing U.S.-made cars, France and the other men created a distinctly American sport. The Strictly Stock division, called the Grand National series, became what NASCAR was known for almost immediately, particularly because professional drivers raced the same model stock cars fans drove to the race, connecting the audience directly to its entertainment.³⁵ In 1959, NASCAR held an event to this effect, allowing race fans to pay to drive their family cars on Daytona Beach to see if their personal cars could break 100 mph like the race cars.³⁶ However, the drivers' use of stock cars rather than modified cars in racing meant that winning came more from their capabilities than from vehicle function, directly contrasting to the original races between bootleggers and other lower working-class white males who relied on mechanics to create the fastest cars. By only allowing stock cars, France hoped to create a larger following than just that of the Southern working-class, though it would take time to garner such attention from the middle-class.

³⁴ Daniel, "Fast and Furious," 97-8.

³⁵ NASCAR has several other divisions, including the Xfinity Series and Truck Series, though NASCAR introduced both much later than the Strictly Stock Series.; Pierce, *Real NASCAR*, 139.

³⁶ "Motor Sports, U.S.A.," *Motor Trends 11*, no. 3, Stock Car Racing Collection, Appalachian State University Libraries Special Collections Research Center, Boone, North Carolina (Feb. 1959): 14.

Beginning with unofficial and often illegal races in the 1920s, any driver that wanted to race and had the means to could, though this would quickly change with NASCAR's official rules in the 1950s. Women and Black Americans were, on occasion, active participants in the races sanctioned by NASCAR, both as spectators and drivers, including a female driver, Sarah Christian, at the first Strictly Stock race in Charlotte on June 19, 1949.³⁷ NASCAR's acceptance of women and Black Americans is not the norm for sports in the mid-twentieth century, exemplifying the nontraditional values displayed by the sport. Had NASCAR catered to middle- or upper-class populations rather than the working-class population, women and Black American drivers likely would not have raced in the initial time period. However, by the mid-1950s, NASCAR officials pushed women out of the pits and out of the driver's seat as racing became more organized and as NASCAR grew in popularity. This change occurred due to "unspecified safety concerns, because they caused a distraction, or because of jealousy," leaving the only role for women in an official capacity as race queen.³⁸ Some women, however, refused to accept their lot on the sidelines, and continued to upend gender norms and jeopardize accepted notions of masculinity, especially evident in driver Louise Smith, who essentially reversed traditional gender roles in her household while she raced and her husband stayed at home to pay the bills.³⁹ Women would return to racing in the 1970s, though they faced much pushback; over 100 women have started in at least one race in

³⁷ Mitchelson and Alderman, "Red Dust and Dynamometers," 50.

³⁸ Daniel, "Fast and Furious," 104.

³⁹ Martha Kreszock, Suzanne Wise, and Margaret Freeman, "Just a Good Ol' Gal: Pioneer Racer Louise Smith," in *Motorsports and American Culture: From Demolition Derbies to NASCAR*, ed. Mark D. Howell and John D. Miller (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 116-7.

NASCAR's history, though only sixteen have made it to the premier league of stock car racing and the Cup Series.⁴⁰

Though both women and Black Americans faced great adversity in the world of NASCAR, Black Americans encountered a tougher battle in maintaining a position in the sport, with only fifteen Black Americans competing as drivers from 1948 to 2021.

NASCAR is unique in that it did not follow the national pattern of racial segregation until later than the rest of the United States. Despite the initial inclusion of Black American drivers in the sport, NASCAR slowly pushed Black Americans out of the driver's seat in the 1950s, despite the rest of the nation instilling segregation since the early 1900s.

Pushback to Black American drivers came in the 1950s due to young white men returning home from World War II and placing themselves back in the racing scene. Whites also pushed out Black Americans in retaliation against the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement, especially after integration in Charlotte began in September 1957.⁴¹ Wendell Scott, who happened to be the first Black American driver and was highly talented and popular, was the only major Black American driver on record in the 1950s and early 1960s. Scott still faced opposition from NASCAR's leadership and fans. For example, track officials in Darlington, South Carolina, banned Scott from competing and NASCAR officials in Jacksonville, Florida, gave Scott's obvious victory in 1963 to another driver so that Scott would not appear in the winner's circle with a white woman

⁴⁰ Shane Acedera, "The History of Female Drivers in NASCAR," *Sport ONE* (Nov. 8, 2018), <https://sport.one/the-history-of-female-drivers-in-nascar/>.

⁴¹ "First Day of Integration at Charlotte Schools," *The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Story, Charlotte Mecklenburg Library*, <https://www.cmstory.org/exhibits/african-american-album-volume-2/1957-first-day-integration-charlotte-schools>.

as race queen.⁴² Furthermore, there has been a mere total of fifteen Black American drivers, including Scott, throughout NASCAR's history. Only one from this list was a Black American woman.⁴³ While derogatory terms used in reference to NASCAR focused on white participants and fans, Black American drivers and fans were not exempt from such terms and had additional racial slurs used against them.⁴⁴ The ongoing systemic racism in the nation and especially in the South has continued to influence NASCAR, creating a somewhat hostile environment for Black Americans who might wish to participate in the sport. For instance, NASCAR did not ban the Confederate flag from speedways until 2020 after Bubba Wallace, the only modern Black American driver, took to national media to advocate for the ban.⁴⁵ Such obvious exclusions of women and Black Americans from the racing scene assist in asserting that NASCAR leadership intended the sport for predominantly white male audiences, though there are small pockets of both women and Black Americans throughout NASCAR's history that did not acknowledge such intentions and there is currently a NASCAR program called "Drive for Diversity" which advocates for the inclusion of minorities in the motorsports world and in NASCAR specifically.⁴⁶

⁴² Daniel, "Fast and Furious," 104-6.

⁴³ There had only been five total Black drivers at the time of the publication of the first referenced article, though more Black drivers have since joined their ranks. "An Oral History of Black NASCAR Drivers," *Complex*, February 22, 2012, <https://www.complex.com/sports/2012/02/an-oral-history-of-black-nascar-drivers/>.; "Every Black Driver in NASCAR History," *Ranker Sports*, June 24, 2020, <https://www.ranker.com/list/nascar-drivers-who-are-black/ranker-sports>.

⁴⁴ Daniel, "Fast and Furious," 91.

⁴⁵ Alex Andrejev, "NASCAR bans use of Confederate flag at all events and properties," *The Charlotte Observer*, *The Charlotte Observer Archives*, June 11, 2020, B1.

⁴⁶ "Drive for Diversity," NASCAR, <https://www.nascar.com/diversity/>.

Like women or Black Americans discouraged from official NASCAR races, those who lacked the money to fund a formal racing effort or lacked the skill to compete on the national level continued to race at dirt tracks across the South, and especially in Charlotte, North Carolina. However, for those teams that could afford to enter races, it behooved them to purchase pre-modified cars from manufacturers with special racing wheels or other parts specific to racing.

One of the original, and crucial, businesses created in Charlotte directly linked to NASCAR is the famous Holman-Moody race car manufacturing business and competitive team.⁴⁷ Without Holman-Moody, NASCAR would not have taken as strong of a hold in Charlotte, and the center of racing may have potentially returned to Atlanta. Such a shift back to Atlanta would have been detrimental to the Charlotte and North Carolina economies, and NASCAR would not be what it is today. Holman-Moody has, for decades, designed, manufactured, and sold top of the line stock cars to a large portion of NASCAR teams. Without Holman-Moody, NASCAR would not have as many safeguards or technological advancements specifically created for racing as there are today, such as the standard stock car racing wheel, window nets, or gas cans.⁴⁸ Additionally, it is one of the longest operating motorsports businesses in the nation and continues to make a name for itself despite seeing quite a few tough times. As such, Holman-Moody is a staple in the Charlotte industrial circuit and further exemplifies the success NASCAR has outside of the sport.

⁴⁷ “Holman-Moody” is the complete name of the company and speaks to the simplicity and humble roots of both the company and NASCAR.

⁴⁸ “History,” Holman-Moody, n.d., <http://www.holmanmoody.com/history.html>.

NASCAR has always had a strong relationship with Ford Motor Company. In 1956, John Holman, a Ford sponsored team owner, moved to Charlotte from California in order to take over the Ford Motor Company racing operations in the city. In the early 1950s, Holman created special stock racing wheels, which became the standard in NASCAR races, making a name for himself in both the auto racing industry as well as the general automobile industry. However, in 1957, the American Manufacturers' Association (AMA) banned all automobile factory involvement in motorsports as the AMA thought this would lead to the production of cars specifically made for racing that would be unsafe for the general public.⁴⁹ Holman partnered with driver Ralph Moody, buying up existing stock cars in order to start their own racing efforts, and Holman-Moody was born.⁵⁰ By the end of 1957, Ford sold its DePaolo Engineering company, the division responsible for all Ford-NASCAR racing efforts, to Holman-Moody, making Holman-Moody one of the premier racing companies in the nation with the stroke of a pen.⁵¹ The duo entered two cars into the last two races of the 1958 season, driven by Joe Weatherly and Curtis Turner; this was the same Turner that went on to assist in building Charlotte Motor Speedway the following year after having won a few races in the 1957 season with only a couple cars and spare parts.⁵² Having two cars in any race in the 1950s

⁴⁹ "1957-The first crest of the performance wave!," *Automotive History Preservation Society*, <http://wildaboutcarsonline.com/cgi-bin/pub9990327521141.cgi?categoryid=9990477144469&action=viewad&itemid=9990477149058>.

⁵⁰ "History," Holman-Moody.

⁵¹ "1957-The first crest of the performance wave!."

⁵² "History," Holman-Moody.; Larry Harding, "Racing Elite Here Tonight," *The Charlotte Observer*, *The Charlotte Observer Archives*, April 18, 1958, 23-B.

was significant as most teams were still just starting out with limited means, and Holman-Moody did so almost as soon as they opened their company's doors.

By the 1958 season, Holman-Moody was building its race cars from scratch, taking the chassis and parts straight off the assembly line. The company sold these made-from-scratch cars to other race teams, making Holman-Moody an extremely popular business. Because of this, other NASCAR teams desired to reside close to Holman-Moody, causing the manufacturer to be one of the earliest reasons that teams decided to call Charlotte home.⁵³ Through the next two decades, Holman-Moody continued to innovate superior car parts and safety mechanisms that became the standard in NASCAR.

In 1975, Holman suffered a heart attack and passed away, after which the company struggled to survive. If the company had indeed perished, NASCAR teams would have more than likely spread out further geographically rather than centering around Charlotte, causing NASCAR's unofficial home to move elsewhere, perhaps around Indianapolis or Atlanta. During the three years following Holman's death in 1975, the company started on a downward spiral which was only reversed after Lee Holman, John Holman's son, decided to start building race cars again rather than simply innovating or improving parts.⁵⁴ Throughout the 1980s and 1990s the team continued to create race cars for its own drivers and other teams and remained the premier race team in the sport, though there was a slight scare at the beginning of the 1980s for the Holman-Moody racing operation.⁵⁵ In 1982, the Charlotte airport gave Holman-Moody a notice that they intended to build a new runway where the Holman-Moody facility was (the

⁵³ "History," Holman-Moody.

⁵⁴ "History," Holman-Moody.

⁵⁵ "History," Holman-Moody.

airport owned the property that the automotive facility sat on). If the airport had forced Holman-Moody to move from its location, the company could have potentially left Charlotte, which would have been detrimental to the racing industry seated in the Queen City. As of 1997, the airport had still not condemned the building and Holman-Moody continued to operate out of their 75,000 square foot space.⁵⁶ However, Holman-Moody downsized from a third of its original size in the 2010s, relocating roughly ten miles south of the Charlotte airport. This was most likely at the behest of the younger Holman.⁵⁷ Despite this downsize, Holman-Moody has remained instrumental to NASCAR racing efforts and advancements within the motorsports industry.

As can be seen, the team made major advancements within NASCAR that benefited the entire sport. Because of the shop's location in the Queen City, Holman-Moody continued to draw other teams to the area, as the other teams wished to be as close as possible to the source of the bulk of their stock cars and manufacturers. Additionally, Holman-Moody is the catalyst that made Charlotte one of only two cities in the nation where motorsports is an actual industry, and a very profitable one at that; the other city in question is Indianapolis, Indiana.⁵⁸

But why did Holman-Moody settle in Charlotte? Why did Ford Motor Company and other large sponsors have racing efforts housed in Charlotte? Why did Big Bill France choose Charlotte and North Carolina in general? A large portion of this answer

⁵⁶ "History," Holman-Moody

⁵⁷ Rob Kinnan, "The real deal: Holman Moody is still around and building cars, and its latest is a reproduction of a historic '64 Fairlane race car that would make an awesome street car," *Hot Rod* 59, no. 5 (May 2006).

⁵⁸ John Oreovicz, "The Racing Heart," *Racer* no. 151 (Nov. 2004): 68-70.

lay in the Queen City's geography and all of its offerings as both a city in the Piedmont and a centrally located city on the Eastern Seaboard.

CHAPTER 3

GEOGRAPHICAL ADVANTAGES AND RACETRACKS

History considers NASCAR a southern sport, with its creation and early races running solely in the Southeast. While geographical area did not constrain bootlegging, the geographical area *did* constrain the traditional values of Southern manhood held by white men involved with bootlegging, such as craving “freedom, action, and even violence.”⁵⁹ Scholars mainly attribute this geographical constraint to the Southeast because of the red clay of the Piedmont area throughout the Carolinas, Georgia, and Virginia, but also because of the predominant bootlegging industry throughout the Piedmont area as well.

While Atlanta may have originally been the largest racing hub in the early twentieth century, conflicts between NASCAR and city officials in the 1940s neutralized Atlanta’s draws, such as its abundant red clay and large metropolitan status. As previously discussed, Atlanta’s civic and religious leaders personally saw to the demise of racing in the metropolis. Because of the growing and continuous conflicts with Atlanta’s leadership, France and the teams of NASCAR moved to the next logical location where red clay was available and NASCAR already had a presence through dirt tracks, some already established teams, and a decently sized rising metropolitan area: Charlotte.

⁵⁹ Pierce, *Real NASCAR*, 12-3.

Besides being the next logical position for the center of the race community, racing became popular in the Piedmont region of Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina for one main reason: red clay. Too far to the west and the black clay was loamy. While loam, which is a mixture of sand and clay, is perfect for agriculture, it is too soft and wet to run a proper automobile race. Too far to the east, and the white clay was too sandy, making the cars sink in and not allowing for a good race. But the red clay of the Piedmont made the perfect track for racing.⁶⁰ This was due to the slick surface that track constructors sheered the red clay down to, allowing for cars to drift around corners. Farmers in the Piedmont where red clay was plentiful took their bulldozers or other equipment and created dirt tracks in their fields. H.A. “Humpy” Wheeler, former president and general manager of Charlotte Motor Speedway, continues to contend that “the most dangerous man in the South was a race fan with a bulldozer,” and dirt tracks were typically built by friends of race promoters who partnered with farmers to create these “sawmill tracks.”⁶¹ They would then either rent the dirt tracks out or take profit for themselves; sometimes they would go so far as to build actual stands around the track.⁶²

Built in 1924 by the city and under architect Jack Prince, who happened to be responsible for a number of other tracks during the early 1900s, the first “official” track in Charlotte only came to be after much convincing from a popular, but undisclosed, race promoter. The track was one-and-a-quarter miles long and was a board auto racetrack –

⁶⁰ H.A. “Humpy” Wheeler, interview by Daniel S. Pierce, July 27, 2005, The Dan Pierce NASCAR Oral History Collection, University of North Carolina Asheville Ramsey Library Special Collections and University Archives, 6.

http://toto.lib.unca.edu/findingaids/oralhistory/NASCAR/wheeler_humpy.pdf.

⁶¹ H.A. “Humpy” Wheeler, interview, 6.

⁶² H.A. “Humpy” Wheeler, interview, 5-6.

cypress and green pine boards laid over the slick red clay track made up the racecourse.⁶³ Board tracks were popular race venues in the earlier automobile racing days of the 1920s, though occasionally automobile races still utilized horse racing tracks, which were especially popular when promoters hunted for ready to go dirt tracks.⁶⁴

On September 23, 1959, Big Bill France announced in the *Charlotte Observer* that it was “with rare pleasure and pride” that he endorsed the World 600, now the Coca-Cola 600, at Charlotte Motor Speedway, which would have a purse of \$100,000, in comparison to the \$2,000 a decade earlier, and that this race would not only be significant for the Charlotte area, but also for NASCAR. According to France, this was because NASCAR needed a major league; the Coca-Cola 600, the longest Strictly Stock race, would provide the base for this major league.⁶⁵ By endorsing the race at Charlotte Motor Speedway, France officially made Charlotte one of NASCAR’s largest racing hubs, if not the largest, particularly in the Southeast.

Though the first NASCAR sanctioned race did not run at Charlotte Motor Speedway, this track became a staple to the Strictly Stock racing circuit. Built by Hall of Fame Class of 2016 inductees Bruton Smith and Curtis Turner (1924-1970), the intermediate speedway started construction in the summer of 1959 and held its first race,

⁶³ Mary Kratt and Mary Manning Boyer, “Leisure Time: Entertainment, Clubs, Recreation, Parks, and Sports,” in *Remembering Charlotte: Postcards from a New South City, 1905-1950* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 57.

⁶⁴ Mike Bell, “Racing roots run deep in Hall County’s red clay,” WDUN, May 13, 2020, <https://accesswdun.com/article/2020/5/902714/racing-roots-run-deep-in-hall-countys-red-clay>.

⁶⁵ “France Oks Race: May 29 Scheduled for Speedway Opener,” *The Charlotte Observer*, *The Charlotte Observer Archives*, Sept. 23, 1959, 21.

the World 600 on June 19, 1960.⁶⁶ Smith and Turner had originally announced within two days of each other separate plans to build speedways in Charlotte, but, after realizing that two speedways would be unsupportable, the two men agreed to become business partners. By the time Smith and Turner announced their plan, Charlotte was becoming an auto racing hub, with teams beginning to settle in the North Carolina Piedmont after Atlanta essentially ran them out of the city due to their working-class status and often criminal backgrounds. Additionally, manufacturers like Holman-Moody had already decided to settle in Charlotte due to its growing airport and industriousness, drawing in more NASCAR teams and therefore becoming the logical construction site for a large speedway.

The Speedway had many firsts for the racing world, both before and after its bankruptcy in 1961. It was the first track to have a drag strip among its facilities, consisting of four paved lanes, constructed in 2008 and still in operation today.⁶⁷ In 1984, Smith built condominiums at the racetrack, making the Speedway the first sports facility in America to offer year-round living accommodations. This consisted of forty units overlooking turn one. By 1992, track leadership installed a custom designed permanent light system that simulated daylight without a glare, making it the first superspeedway to host auto racing at night; night racing allowed for longer races and made it possible to

⁶⁶ NASCAR initially dubbed Charlotte Motor Speedway a superspeedway. Originally, “superspeedway” referred to a track over a mile long, but now refers to a track over two miles long. An intermediate speedway is between one and two miles long. “Track History,” Charlotte Motor Speedway, <https://www.charlottemotorspeedway.com/fans/track-history/>.

⁶⁷ “Track History,” Charlotte Motor Speedway.

continue past sunset after delays when previously races had to stop due to drivers no longer being able to see the track clearly.⁶⁸

In 2018, Charlotte Motor Speedway introduced the Bank of America ROVAL 400, a 2.280-mile, seventeen-turn ROVAL course.⁶⁹ ROVAL is the combination of a road and oval racecourse, which Charlotte Motor Speedway is in a unique position to host. By having its road course in the infield of the oval track, this race is logistically possible without new construction being necessary, and the Speedway is one of the few in the country to cater to this particular innovation. Despite being a newer race for the Cup Series, it has quickly become a fan favorite as well as a new way to test drivers' capabilities. Due to the multiple sharp turns, it is impossible to go through the track at the same speeds one would achieve on a traditional oval course. The ROVAL race is by no means a new concept to NASCAR, but the last time NASCAR included a ROVAL race in the Cup Series was in 2003. Additionally, NASCAR had not introduced a new course to the Cup Series since 2011 in Kentucky.⁷⁰ Both of these facts make the addition of the ROVAL race at Charlotte Motor Speedway that much more significant, continuing to bring monumental races to the Queen City, which already hosts NASCAR's longest race, the Coca-Cola 600, as well as the All-Star race.

Aside from its monumental firsts and the significant races run at the Speedway, the initial 550-acre tract of land that held the Speedway also had a 100-unit motel,

⁶⁸ Superspeedway in the traditional definition, not the current definition. "Track History," Charlotte Motor Speedway.; Joseph Siano, "Lights, Action, Nascar: Charlotte's New Nightspot: A Thousand Bulbs, a Long Oval and a Bright Future for Tracks.," *New York Times*, 1992, sec. Sports Monday.

⁶⁹ "Track History," Charlotte Motor Speedway.

⁷⁰ C. Jackson Cowart, "Playoff twist for 2018? It's a ROVAL, and it's in Charlotte," *The Charlotte Observer*, *The Charlotte Observer Archives*, May 24, 2017, 1B.

restaurant, two-and-a-half-mile road course, and Speedway offices when it opened in 1960.⁷¹ By the 1990s, the Speedway also had a two-and-a-quarter-mile asphalt road course, a fifth-of-a-mile clay oval course, and a quarter-of-a-mile asphalt oval course, and had grown to roughly 2,000 acres of land. These three tracks were all also completely lit with the same system installed on the main track, and continue to have other various racing groups, including the World Karting Association and International Cycle Events, use them.⁷² As previously noted, the Speedway was also the first to include its own dragstrip among its facilities in 2008. The Speedway even hosted a professional football game between the Philadelphia Eagles and Washington Redskins in 1961 and was the first speedway to do so.⁷³ By showcasing its versatility, Smith, Turner, and Wheeler made a name for the Speedway, a name that would set Charlotte among some of the top raceways in the country. The tracks themselves, both dirt and professional, were not the only geographical draw for NASCAR to reside in Charlotte. The physical geography and placement of the Queen City within the United States also made it desirable, especially since races did not move off the Eastern Seaboard until the 1970s and 1980s.

⁷¹ “Charlotte to Run Under NASCAR,” *NASCAR News Letter* IX, no. 18 (September 25, 1959), Stock Car Racing Collection, Appalachian State University Libraries Special Collections Research Center, Boone, North Carolina.

⁷² “The History of Charlotte Motor Speedway,” Charlotte Motor Speedway (1994), Stock Car Racing Collection, Appalachian State University Libraries Special Collections Research Center, Boone, North Carolina.

⁷³ “Charlotte Motor Speedway’s Racing News,” Charlotte Motor Speedway (1961), Stock Car Racing Collection, Appalachian State University Libraries Special Collections Research Center, Boone, North Carolina.

The Queen City is equidistant between New York and Miami, with 53 percent of the nation's population within 650 miles of the city (equivalent to a two-hour flight).⁷⁴ With NASCAR races beginning to spread further along the Eastern Seaboard by the end of the 1960s, Charlotte's equidistance was extremely beneficial in terms of team travel, as well as fan travel. It was also highly advantageous that there was an airport not far from where races ran, and teams called home. Though both Charlotte and Daytona, Florida, started airports in the mid-1930s, one grew significantly while the other did not. While the Daytona Beach International Airport is located directly beside the Daytona International Speedway, both the speedway and airport are small, especially in comparison to the airport and speedway in Charlotte. For example, Daytona International Speedway consists of 480 acres of land.⁷⁵ Charlotte Motor Speedway sits on almost 2,000 acres.⁷⁶ Likewise, Daytona Beach International Airport owns 2,000 acres of land and Charlotte-Douglas International Airport owns over 6,000 acres of land, with the City of Charlotte continuing to buy property surrounding the airport.⁷⁷ Not only this, but there is a second airport (Concord-Padgett Regional Airport) located even closer to Charlotte

⁷⁴ *Charlotte Region: America's New Business Horizon* (Charlotte: The Carolinas Partnership, 1994), Stock Car Racing Collection, Appalachian State University Libraries Special Collections Research Center, Boone, North Carolina.

⁷⁵ "Daytona 500 facts & figures," *Orlando Sentinel* (February 19, 2005), <https://www.orlandosentinel.com/sports/nascar/orl-spt-car-daytona500facts-htmlstory.html>.

⁷⁶ "Track Facts," Charlotte Motor Speedway, <https://www.charlottemotorspeedway.com/fans/track-facts/>.

⁷⁷ "Available Real Estate," Daytona Beach International Airport, <http://www.flydaytonafirst.com/about-dab/available-real-estate.stml>.; "Strategic Plan," Charlotte-Douglas International Airport, <https://www.cltairport.com/community/commercial-development/strategic-plan/>.

Motor Speedway than Charlotte-Douglas International Airport, making more local travel even easier, especially for teams.

These geographical factors are the main reasons why NASCAR settled in the Queen City, though they are by no means the only ones. However, the geographical factors surrounding Charlotte explain in large part why NASCAR teams decided to settle in the Queen City, with Charlotte Motor Speedway and the NASCAR Hall of Fame falling in alongside the teams. This becomes incredibly clear by examining the NASCAR teams and why they settled in Charlotte.

CHAPTER 4

NASCAR'S TEAMS

Over 90 percent of NASCAR's race teams reside within the greater Charlotte area.⁷⁸ As of 1997, only seven of fifty-three teams were not located in the Charlotte region.⁷⁹ While this may seem odd given that NASCAR's official headquarters are located in Daytona Beach, Florida, and that Charlotte remained relatively quiet in the early days of the sport after its first race in Charlotte, the previously discussed geographical factor coupled with the relatively overlooked factor of the Charlotte area airport contributed greatly to the foundation of the auto racing hub. Charlotte-Douglas International Airport opened in 1935 as a municipal airport, but quickly grew, and is much larger than Daytona Beach International Airport, discussed in Chapter 3.⁸⁰ By the time air travel was becoming popular in the mid-1900s, race teams realized it would be extremely beneficial to be near a quick form of travel, especially when traveling across the country, and, eventually, to other countries. The airport's growth and convenient location factor into why race teams parked themselves in Charlotte, along with the advantageous position of Charlotte in the nation and NASCAR's fallout with Atlanta.

⁷⁸ Howell, *From Moonshine to Madison Avenue*, 213-220; Kytja Weir, "Lincoln's low-key racing," *The Charlotte Observer* (May 28, 2004).

⁷⁹ Howell, *From Moonshine to Madison Avenue*, 213-220.

⁸⁰ "Aviation Department," The City of Charlotte, [https://charlottenc.gov/aviation/Pages/default.aspx#:~:text=Charlotte%20Douglas%20International%20Airport%20\(CLT\)%20was%20established%20in%201935%20and,Douglas%20International%20Airport%20in%201982.](https://charlottenc.gov/aviation/Pages/default.aspx#:~:text=Charlotte%20Douglas%20International%20Airport%20(CLT)%20was%20established%20in%201935%20and,Douglas%20International%20Airport%20in%201982.)

Not only did it allow for quicker and easier travel, but it also made it incredibly easy for teams to order parts and for the manufacturers to then deliver parts quickly.⁸¹

Charlotte is by no means exceptional for having a larger airport by the 1970s and the airport is not a valid sole explanation of why NASCAR teams remained in the area once air travel became common. The area surrounding the Queen City already held well established teams, and it would be detrimental, both financially and in terms of relationships, for teams to move shop locations. Teams had made critical relationships with manufacturers like Holman-Moody and would not benefit from moving away from suppliers. These relationships in particular, coupled with the geographical factor and the airport, are the reason why teams remain, especially considering that several generations of racing families, like the Earnhardt or Petty families, have fostered some of these relationships. While some teams have moved to the Northeast and Midwest, they are the outliers, with over 90 percent of the teams still residing in the Charlotte area. Additionally, there is a degree of nostalgia that has kept teams in their Charlotte shops, and teams saw no need to change their current situations.

The teams' presences within the Charlotte area have resulted in an ongoing automobile racing culture. Fans from across the world come to tour the shops and their museums, if they have one, like Richard Petty Motorsports (who moved from Level Cross, North Carolina, to Concord just outside of Charlotte in 2008) or Hendrick Motorsports.⁸² One of the byproducts of having so many race teams in one area is a large

⁸¹ Dan Simone, in conversation with author, March 13, 2020.

⁸² "FAQs," Richard Petty Motorsports (blog), accessed October 24, 2020, <http://richardpettymotorsports.com/faqs/>.; "Visit Us," Hendrick Motorsports, accessed October 24, 2020, <http://www.hendrickmotorsports.com/about/visit/>.; Mitchelson and Alderman, "Red Dust and Dynamometers," 66.

auto racing culture that extends to local businesses. As of 1997, there were twelve race themed restaurants, and three racing schools in the Charlotte area.⁸³ As of 2021, however, those numbers have grown with seven racing schools; four NASCAR driving experiences where fans can drive or ride along with a professional in a stock car on a real track; and a multitude of NASCAR themed restaurants, including one with stock cars on its roof, or restaurants owned by prominent drivers.⁸⁴ This reach has only extended after NASCAR officials granted the NASCAR Hall of Fame to Charlotte, drawing in an even larger number of race fan tourists, as well as school groups from around the area. Race fans are always welcome to visit team shops and museums, though some are located off the beaten path, such as with Hendrick Motorsports.

Rick Hendrick, one of the most influential NASCAR professionals since the 1970s and one of the 2017 Hall of Fame inductees, started as a used car dealer turned driver and team owner, and exemplifies the success of NASCAR in the Charlotte area best as one of the more contemporary drivers. He is an excellent example of the economic impact NASCAR has on Charlotte, not only through the sport but through the ambition the sport inspires in its participants. Hendrick now owns over 140 car dealerships across fourteen states and is the owner and operator of the largest privately held dealership group in the nation, with headquarters in the Queen City.⁸⁵ On the

⁸³ Howell, *From Moonshine to Madison Avenue*, 225-8.

⁸⁴ There is no comprehensive list of locations since Mark Howell's publication in 1997. "Racing Schools," Charlotte Motor Speedway, <https://www.charlottemotorspeedway.com/experiences/racing-schools/>; "Plan a Racing Themed Trip to Charlotte North Carolina," In Town Suites, <https://www.intownsuites.com/plan-a-racing-themed-trip-to-charlotte-north-carolina/>.

⁸⁵ "Rick Hendrick," Hendrick Motorsports, <http://www.hendrickmotorsports.com/about/rick-hendrick>.

NASCAR side of the Hendrick franchise, Hendrick Motorsports owns and operates four teams out of the Charlotte area and has created over 600 jobs in the four decades it has been around. Additionally, annual revenue for the group averages just under \$180 million.⁸⁶ This is only one of twenty major motorsports groups that participate in NASCAR races.⁸⁷ If Hendrick Motorsports indicates the amount of revenue the rest of the racing groups produce, and it surely does for the larger team operations like Stewart-Haas Racing or Petty Motorsports, it can safely be assumed that the teams alone bring in at least \$3 billion annually, not including the annual revenue of the NASCAR business itself, the track owners' revenue, revenue to local businesses on race weekends, or revenue to NASCAR and team sponsors. While Rick Hendrick has had a larger influence in NASCAR history than many other drivers or team owners can boast of, he is by no means the only direct influence or the largest influence of NASCAR in the Queen City.

⁸⁶ "Rick Hendrick," Hendrick Motorsports.

⁸⁷ "List of NASCAR Racing Teams," NASCAR, <https://www.nascar.com/racing-teams>.

CHAPTER 5

CHARLOTTE'S GLORY ROAD

On May 11, 2010, the NASCAR Hall of Fame opened its doors to the public for the first time. Seated almost at the very heart of the Queen City, the Hall of Fame remains committed to presenting the history of both competitive stock car and stock truck auto racing.⁸⁸ Charlotte leaders hired I.M. Pei, architect of the glass pyramid in front of the Louvre in France and the Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, to design the NASCAR Hall of Fame, creating a beautiful building imitating an oval racetrack in the middle of Uptown Charlotte to compete with the traditional high rises. The architect alone set the Hall apart from other motorsports halls of fame, with Charlotte officials purposely obtaining a world-renowned architect to accentuate the city and place it in the major league of museums.⁸⁹ Obtaining such a monumental architect also speaks to city officials' commitment to honoring the city's heritage of racing and the commitment to put the Hall of Fame in a place of high honor among the city's sports.

While Charlotte may initially seem an odd location to place the NASCAR Hall of Fame, especially since the city was up against Atlanta, Georgia, and Daytona Beach, Florida, for potential locations, the choice of Charlotte to host the Hall is deeply rooted in the sport's history and connection to the Queen City, with then Charlotte Mayor Pat

⁸⁸ City of Charlotte Finance Department, 2010 Annual Report, accessed October 8, 2020, 109.

⁸⁹ As opposed to being more on par with a local museum or one not government operated.

McCrorry noting that “Charlotte is very underappreciated – in that way we’re like NASCAR.”⁹⁰ McCrorry’s comment gives a glimpse into Charlotte’s continual need to confirm its place in the sports world as well as its place on state, national, and global levels. The choice to bid for the Hall came in 2005 after Charlotte presented legislation headed by McCrorry to the North Carolina State Government in hopes of gaining permission to open the NASCAR Hall of Fame, with help from the state for funding. McCrorry and his campaign met with success, and the Queen City with assistance from state funds constructed the Hall of Fame.⁹¹

NASCAR official’s choice of Charlotte may seem surprising to a non-race fan, but other notable automobile racing cities already had their own motorsports halls of fame. The International Motorsports Hall of Fame (IMHF), established in 1983, is located in Talladega, Alabama, another of NASCAR’s most prominent cities. IMHF dedicates itself to all forms of motorsports. Unlike the NASCAR Hall of Fame, IMHF nominates and elects those involved with motorsports globally. Sixty-three of the 144 inductees are related in some form to NASCAR, though there are some inductees like Smokey Yunick included in the IMHF but not in the NASCAR Hall of Fame.⁹²

⁹⁰ Scott Dodd, “Charlotte: Where Hall ‘Needs to Be’ - In the End, Officials Said the City’s Deep Roots in NASCAR Were What Brought the Hall of Fame,” *The Charlotte Observer*, *The Charlotte Observer Archives*, March 7, 2006.; Walter Woods, “NASCAR Hall of Fame: Charlotte sees racing hall as key to tourism growth,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, Aug. 17, 2005, <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&t=pubname%3AAJBK%21Atlanta%2BJournal-Constitution%252C%2BThe%2B%2528GA%2529/year%3A2005%212005/mody%3A0817%21August%2B17&action=browse&format=text&docref=news/10C0BDF929715060>.

⁹¹ Dodd, “Charlotte: Where Hall ‘Needs to Be.’”

⁹² There is speculation amongst sports journalists that Yunick is not in the NASCAR Hall of Fame because of a strained relationship with founder Bill France as well as quite a few

In another vein, in 2014 the Motorsports Hall of Fame of America announced its intentions of moving from Novi, Michigan, to Daytona International Speedway by January 2016, despite the fact that NASCAR had already passed over Daytona as the location for the NASCAR Hall of Fame due to the limited amount of fan traffic. The caveat, however, was that the Motorsports Hall of Fame would take over the space formerly devoted to the “Daytona 500 Experience” where fans could tour the track and learn more about NASCAR’s history.⁹³ Many of NASCAR’s tracks have museums attached to them or nearby, sponsored by various motorsports organizations. For instance, the National Motorsports Press Association (NMPA) sponsors Darlington Raceway’s museum and hall of fame in South Carolina.⁹⁴ The primary and most critical difference between these other halls of fame and the NASCAR Hall of Fame is that the Hall in Charlotte is the only one solely dedicated to NASCAR rather than motorsports in general and is the only one licensed by NASCAR and not operated by a racetrack or NASCAR team.

While NASCAR’s birth happened in Daytona Beach, Florida, its limited fan traffic forced the city to the bottom of the list. Essentially, the location became a choice

instances of cheating. “Hall of Fame Members,” International Motorsports Hall of Fame, <https://www.motorsportshalloffame.com/hall-of-fame-members/>; Al Pearce, “Why Smokey Yunick is not (and may never be) in the NASCAR Hall of Fame,” *Autoweek*, March 27, 2016, https://www.autoweek.com/racing/nascar/a1842751/case-smokey-yunick/?utm_campaign=awracingweekend&utm_content=body&utm_medium=newsletter&utm_source=RacingWeekend20160327&utm_term=headline-top.

⁹³ “Motorsports Hall of Fame of America moving from Detroit to Daytona International Speedway,” Fox News (January 24, 2014), <https://www.foxnews.com/sports/motorsports-hall-of-fame-of-america-moving-from-detroit-to-daytona-international-speedway>.

⁹⁴ “Darlington Raceway Stock Car Museum & NMPA Hall of Fame,” Discover South Carolina, <https://discoversouthcarolina.com/products/1425>.

between Atlanta and Charlotte for NASCAR officials. Atlanta has a complicated history with NASCAR and Bill France, as previously discussed in Chapter 2. It could be said, and NASCAR historian Dan Pierce does, that Atlanta lost the bid for the Hall of Fame over sixty years before the Hall was even imagined, when Atlanta city officials and religious leaders cracked down on who they would allow to drive in races at Lakewood Park in 1945.⁹⁵

Aside from the political and religious leaders' campaign against bootleggers, the growing middle class in Atlanta was trying as hard as they could to distinguish themselves from anything that was reminiscent of the Southern reputation of being poverty stricken and majority working-class population.⁹⁶ While the idea of the "lowdown" was a growing issue for the middle-class, it was also an issue for NASCAR, who was trying to make a place for itself in the larger world of sports. Because of the negative connotations surrounding the lower working-class and their rough appearances and attitudes, NASCAR needed to find a way to make the sport of automobile racing more appealing to the ever-growing middle class. Atlanta city officials were making this problem difficult for NASCAR to remedy, as Atlanta was trying to make itself into a metropolitan area which would only grow with a satisfied middle-class, with the city presenting an upper-middle-class narrative. Charlotte was also growing at the same time as Atlanta, though the working-class did not face nearly as much opposition from Charlotte leadership between the 1940s and 1960s. It was not until the 1980s when Charlotte became a banking center that the middle- and upper-class took over Charlotte's

⁹⁵ Pierce, "'What is your Racket, Brother?'" , 85, 93-4.

⁹⁶ Pierce, "'What is your Racket, Brother?'" , 90-1.

narrative and built the city to be more than the industrial mill town in which the working-class was in charge during the early and mid-1900s.

The attempted erasure of Atlanta's bootlegging history by city officials in the 1940s by means of banning former bootleggers from racing led to Atlanta's exclusion as the premier racing hub in the southeast as well as the seat for the Hall of Fame. Comparatively, the historic aspect of the positive relationship between Charlotte and NASCAR, the public funding guaranteed by city officials that NASCAR leadership was looking for, and the fact that over 90 percent of racing teams are also housed in and around the city all resulted in NASCAR officials choosing Charlotte for the location of the Hall of Fame, as the officials felt these reasons spoke to the true history of NASCAR, which is a large factor of the Hall of Fame's purpose.⁹⁷

The City of Charlotte owns the Hall, and the Charlotte Regional Visitors Authority, not NASCAR, runs it. While NASCAR does not receive any of the Hall's revenue there were major benefits to the Queen City owning and operating the Hall. The Hall of Fame overall cost \$189 million (though both the Bank of America and Wells-Fargo wrote off roughly \$17 million in loans in 2015), which included the hall, ballroom in the convention center, office space, and a parking deck. Charlotte guaranteed public funding to take care of the entire cost by raising the hotel occupancy tax by two percent, private bank loans, and through the selling of state held land parcels, though NASCAR did end up purchasing the office space from the city and now run almost all of their

⁹⁷ City of Charlotte Finance Department, 109.; Dodd, "Charlotte: Where Hall 'Needs to Be.'"

media operations out of the Charlotte offices.⁹⁸ NASCAR does, however, still receive the byproducts of increased fan activity within the city around races, as there are at least two races in Charlotte every year, as well as getting younger demographics involved with auto race culture through school and extracurricular group field trips. However, after Dale Earnhardt's death on February 18, 2001 in the last lap of the Daytona 500, fans dropped off marginally.⁹⁹ NASCAR also intended for the Hall of Fame to assist in increasing NASCAR's fanbase to what it was before Earnhardt's death, though it is still difficult to gauge pure fanbase versus visitors to the Hall, which include school field trips, non-fan-based groups, people using I-77 en route to Florida, travelers coming through Charlotte-Douglas International Airport, and visitors to the convention center in the same complex as the Hall.¹⁰⁰

Because of the vast array in visitor demographics, the NASCAR Hall of Fame presents a somewhat sanitized version of NASCAR, though the sanctioning body of NASCAR is to blame for the most part by insisting that the sport does not find its basis in bootlegging and by attempting to gain fans through Hall visitorship. While earlier connotations of the working-class sport were negative to those in the middle- and upper-classes, the Hall of Fame presents a brief history of the sport but then takes on a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) approach by educating on the different parts of the stock cars and the more logistical aspects of the sport in order to attract those who may still possess preconceived ideas, such as that NASCAR is a

⁹⁸ City of Charlotte Finance Department, 109.; Shelly Sigo, "Bank Loans Forgiven for NASCAR Hall of Fame," *The Bond Buyer* 1, no. 324242 (January 14, 2015), 67.

⁹⁹ "Earnhardt Legend ends at Daytona," *The Charlotte Observer* (February 19, 2001), 6A-8A.

¹⁰⁰ Dan Simone, email message to author, June 30, 2021.

working-class sport.¹⁰¹ By focusing more on the STEM portion of the sport outside of its two key historical exhibits, the Hall makes a significant effort to engage middle- and upper-class populations as well as school groups and other youth-based clubs.¹⁰² This is strategic on the part of Hall staff, as the working-class NASCAR fan base is willing to come based on their interest, while non-fans are more likely to attend for educational purposes. However, the Hall potentially marginalizes certain populations that may be more likely interested in the sport based off historic demographics by setting ticket prices higher than any other museum in the area. The basic ticket price averages to around \$20 per visitor, meaning a family of four pays almost \$100 to spend a day at the Hall, not including possible food, photo, simulator experience, and souvenir purchases.¹⁰³ These higher prices are a major deterrent for lower- or even some middle-class families.

The Hall’s mission statement notes that the Hall aims to “[d]rive economic impact for the Charlotte region[, h]onor the heritage and history of NASCAR[, and c]ultivate loyalty for both the NASCAR Hall of Fame and NASCAR through delivering a multi-faceted experience that is interactive, entertaining, educational, immersive and engaging.”¹⁰⁴ While the statement is worded generally enough to address all audiences, it also aims specifically to create new fans through its third point, to cultivate loyalty. NASCAR fan numbers have decreased for a number of reasons including other, more diverse ways of spending leisure time; growing costs of fuel, lodging, and

¹⁰¹ Visit to the NASCAR Hall of Fame by the author.

¹⁰² Dan Simone, in conversation with author, March 13, 2020.

¹⁰³ “Tickets & Combo Packages,” NASCAR Hall of Fame, <https://www.nascarhall.com/tickets#packages>.

¹⁰⁴ “About the Hall,” NASCAR Hall of Fame, Charlotte Regional Visitors Authority, March 18, 2020, <https://www.nascarhall.com/about-the-hall>.

accommodations; and an aging fanbase.¹⁰⁵ Additionally, the tragedy of Earnhardt's death in 2001 as well as other superstar drivers' retirements caused the fan base to decline after its peak in 2005.¹⁰⁶ The Hall of Fame attempts to supplement the fanbase by appealing to those demographics typically not found within the sport's fanbase.

While the Hall does draw race fans from across the globe, it also provides a more respectable location in the eyes of the middle- and upper-classes instead of going to the tracks or a team's shop in order to learn about NASCAR. By "respectable" I mean that middle-and upper-class demographics are more likely to interact with NASCAR in a more controlled environment, whereas at a track the typically working-class fanbase can become rather rowdy and deter middle- and working-classes from attending events. By creating such a space, NASCAR and Charlotte cater to more demographics than just race fans, promote education, and potentially draw more fans to the sport, especially those who may not have enjoyed NASCAR if they had visited a track instead of the Hall.

There are two central exhibits to the Hall, both commemorating the history of the sport. The first, entitled "Glory Road," consists of eighteen stock cars placed on a realistic track.¹⁰⁷ These cars range from the beginning of NASCAR in 1947 to current times, curated by both the museum staff and guest curators like Dale Earnhardt, Jr, who

¹⁰⁵ Karlo Manalo, "These are the reasons why NASCAR is Losing Fans," *HotCars*, June 22, 2020, <https://www.hotcars.com/these-are-the-reasons-why-nascar-is-losing-fans/>.

¹⁰⁶ Liz Clarke, "Death of Dale Earnhardt 10 years ago changed NASCAR, and not necessarily for the better," *The Washington Post*, February 17, 2011, https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/ten-years-after-dale-earnhardts-death-nascar-is-facing-a-checkered-future/2011/02/17/ABUEVnQ_story.html.; Matt McLaughlin, "Beside the Rising Tide: Hey, Where Did Everybody Go?," *FrontStretch*, February 21, 2021, <https://www.frontstretch.com/2021/02/22/beside-the-rising-tide-hey-where-did-everybody-go/>.

¹⁰⁷ Visit to the NASCAR Hall of Fame by the author.

select cars based on a common theme; for instance, Earnhardt, Jr.'s curated exhibit focuses on championship cars.¹⁰⁸ The Hall contends with limited stock car availability, as many have been destroyed in some way or the owner is unwilling or unable to loan it to the Hall for the three-year period that the cars are on display. The limited availability places a rather large restriction on which cars curators select to go in the themed exhibit.¹⁰⁹ The other central exhibit is the name sake of the institution, the "Hall of Fame." This exhibit is in a circular room central to the museum and houses the honorees. Each has their own videos that play on individual screens, with the newest honorees having displays in the center of the room for one year, which includes one of their stock cars, uniforms, trophies, photos, or other memorabilia.¹¹⁰ Both of these exhibits draw visitors every year for the unveiling of the new honorees and are at the heart of the museum portion of the Hall. Surprisingly, not a single exhibit review has appeared regarding the Hall and makes one wonder if the public history world considers the Hall as a serious museum. Regardless of whether or not the field in general does take the museum seriously, it should, as the Hall has a full museum staff, thoroughly researched and well curated exhibits, and makes a goal of educating the public on both historic and current aspects of NASCAR, despite both NASCAR and Charlotte leadership placing constraints on staff.¹¹¹

The current selection process for the inductees is incredibly involved. Each year, starting with the 2021 inductees, Hall of Fame staff, NASCAR officials, track owners,

¹⁰⁸ "Dale Jr.: Glory Road Champions," NASCAR Hall of Fame, <https://www.nascarhall.com/explore/exhibits/glory-road-champions>.

¹⁰⁹ Dan Simone, in conversation with author, March 13, 2020.

¹¹⁰ Visit to the NASCAR Hall of Fame by the author.

¹¹¹ Visit to the NASCAR Hall of Fame by the author.

and prominent members of the media select fifteen nominees. Ten of the nominees are part of the “New Era,” selected in February by twenty-two members of the Nomination Committee, and five are part of the “Pioneer Era,” selected in April by the forty-three members of the Honors Committee as well as any living Hall of Famers. The pioneers are those around subsequent to and at the start of NASCAR. The “New Era” nominees include anyone later than that. Of these nominees, sixty-five votes select two inductees from the “New Era” ballot and one from the “Pioneer Era” ballot.¹¹² From 2010 through 2020, the ballots were not divided into two eras, and five inductees were selected instead of three.¹¹³ The changes came after growing concerns over whether there would be enough nominations in the coming years due to how quickly the Hall of Fame was filling, and the need for inductees to be spectacular.¹¹⁴ Such changes demonstrate the continued uniqueness of NASCAR as an institution, especially given that the company has rewritten its rules both for the sport and for how Hall of Famers are selected in the past few decades. As of 2021, the Hall of Fame numbers fifty-eight founders, track owners, drivers, pioneering influencers, and crew chiefs, all of them white males with the exception of Wendell Scott in the Class of 2015.¹¹⁵

Press coverage has continually been high for NASCAR events throughout the years, especially after NASCAR leadership announced a NASCAR Hall of Fame and that

¹¹² “NASCAR Hall of Fame Induction Process,” NASCAR Hall of Fame, <https://www.nascarhall.com/hall-of-famers/process>.

¹¹³ “NASCAR announces changes to NASCAR Hall of Fame induction process,” NASCAR, February 5, 2020, <https://www.nascar.com/news-media/2020/02/05/nascar-announces-changes-to-nascar-hall-of-fame-induction-process/>.

¹¹⁴ Dan Simone, in conversation with author, March 13, 2020.

¹¹⁵ “NASCAR Hall of Fame Inductees,” NASCAR Hall of Fame, <https://www.nascarhall.com/hall-of-famers/inductees>.

the location was still in question. The first article *The Charlotte Observer* printed in relation to the Hall was indeed particularly small and outshone by a picture of a skink.¹¹⁶ However, within four months, Charlotte's campaign to house the Hall was the front page spread.¹¹⁷ Throughout the weeks leading up to the opening of the Hall of Fame, *The Charlotte Observer* published impressive coverage encouraging readers to visit; the issue being that this only worked with those who read the newspaper, mostly middle- and upper-class populations. With press coverage increasingly positive, support from locals should have grown with it. However, opinion pieces also questioned whether the typical museum goer, the "wine and cheese museum goer," would welcome the sort of demographic, those considered working-class, if the Hall were to open in Charlotte.¹¹⁸ The drastic shift from the Hall being negligible to front page news in such a short time span begs the question of how could native Charlotteans not fully support such an endeavor? City leadership subversively used the media to garner support for the museum, despite the typical museum goer not necessarily on board with the museum. The Hall of Fame has continually succeeded in its endeavor to pull in race fans and non-fans alike, and further promotes national and international viewership of NASCAR. The Hall is not, however, the only way that NASCAR has garnered increased viewership of its unique sport.

¹¹⁶ Richard Rubin, "City in race for NASCAR museum," *The Charlotte Observer*, *The Charlotte Observer* Archives (September 2, 2004), B2.

¹¹⁷ Richard Rubin, "NASCAR hall of fame race on: Charlotte among 4 invited," *The Charlotte Observer*, *The Charlotte Observer* Archives (January 4, 2005), A1.

¹¹⁸ Don Scholes, "'NASCAR Hall': Are we ready to 'bundle'?", *The Charlotte Observer*, *The Charlotte Observer* Archives (January 6, 2005), A8.

Due to the combination of so many teams choosing Charlotte as home and the prominence of Charlotte Motor Speedway, discussed in Chapter 3, in the automobile racing world, Hollywood eventually came to the Queen City in order to exhibit NASCAR to the world. Such national attention not only garnered support and revenue for the Queen City, but also brought attention to NASCAR which otherwise the nation would not have recognized. Furthermore, NASCAR related movies, such as *Cars*, have made appearances in the Hall of Fame through temporary exhibits with characters like Lightning McQueen on display.

At the end of the 1980s, Hendrick Motorsports gave popular American actor Tom Cruise the opportunity to drive one of the team's cars around the Daytona International Speedway. After reaching speeds nearing 200 mph, Cruise jumped out of the car and said, "We have to make a movie about this!"¹¹⁹ Enter Paramount Pictures with Don Simpson and Jerry Bruckheimer. Rick Hendrick, the owner of Hendrick Motorsports and a popular former NASCAR driver, and his team were already involved, and so the movie crew naturally visited the team's shop in the Charlotte area; Bruckheimer even went so far as to admit that, "[w]e don't make 'Days of Thunder' without Rick Hendrick's cooperation, plain and simple."¹²⁰ The opening scene of the movie is even based off one of Hendrick's own interactions when he was starting his own team. Likewise, quite a few lines came from interactions between Hendrick, his partners and team, rivals, and NASCAR officials. The cars used in the film were based out of and repaired at the

¹¹⁹ Ryan McGee, "NASCAR and Hollywood were never the same after 'Days of Thunder,'" ESPN, June 29, 2020, https://www.espn.com/racing/nascar/story/_/id/29364669/nascar-hollywood-were-never-same-days-thunder.

¹²⁰ McGee, "NASCAR and Hollywood were never the same after 'Days of Thunder.'"

Hendrick Motorsports shop and the film resulted in a “graveyard” of wrecked cars behind the Hendrick garage, reminding production just how costly the movie was.¹²¹

The crew filmed scenes at both Daytona International Speedway and Charlotte Motor Speedway, running in real NASCAR Sprint Cup (Strictly Stock) Series races, including the famous Daytona 500. Before the Daytona 500, Bill France, Jr., the CEO of NASCAR at the time and son of founder Bill France, met with the drivers and made sure they knew not to pass any of the camera cars running in the race. One of the drivers, Rick Mast, asked, “‘Mr. France, if it gets late in the race and I think I have a chance to win the Daytona 500 ...’ and he said, ‘Rick, I know you are working hard to make it full time in NASCAR. Well, I run NASCAR and I own most of the NASCAR tracks, so I can guarantee you that if you pass one car out there, you will absolutely never make it in NASCAR,’” exemplifying the necessity of the film for the furtherance of the sport in the national view.¹²² France, Jr.’s comments also exemplified his complete power over the sport of NASCAR and how he could make or break a driver with one word. Mast ended up being a popular driver in the late 1900’s, though he would win a limited number of races.¹²³ This interaction also indicates how political NASCAR is; if France, Jr. shunned Mast, so would other track owners because they would not want to be shunned in turn as owners relied on revenue from NASCAR races at their tracks.

The film crew even went so far as to rent out an entire floor of the Hilton Hotel in Charlotte and cut holes in the walls to be able to walk from room to room without using

¹²¹ McGee, “NASCAR and Hollywood were never the same after ‘Days of Thunder.’”

¹²² McGee, “NASCAR and Hollywood were never the same after ‘Days of Thunder.’”

¹²³ Tim Southers, “Where are they now? Rick Mast reflects on NASCAR career,” *Motorsport.com*, January 17, 2017, <https://us.motorsport.com/nascar-cup/news/where-are-they-now-rick-mast-reflects-on-nascar-career-866351/3011645/>.

doors, a significant cost to Hollywood and therefore significant revenue for Charlotte. The film opened in June 1990 on 2,307 screens across the nation and brought in \$15.4 million opening weekend, but not before Hollywood held a premier for the racing community in none other than the Queen City.¹²⁴

Days of Thunder coupled with other more recent titles like *Cars*, in which Humpy Wheeler of Charlotte Motor Speedway voiced a minor character, and *Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby*, mostly filmed in the Charlotte area with Charlotte Motor Speedway used for the majority of race scenes and only one week of filming actually completed in Talladega, has placed Charlotte in Hollywood's view and therefore in national view.¹²⁵ The film industry was not the only one to generate revenue for the Queen City, as NASCAR had already been doing well on its own and continued to do so long after the cameras stopped rolling.

¹²⁴ McGee, "NASCAR and Hollywood were never the same after 'Days of Thunder.'"

¹²⁵ "Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby Filming and Production," *International Movie Database*, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0415306/locations>.

CHAPTER 6

BY THE NUMBERS

NASCAR is one of the largest industries in North Carolina despite not being a highly promoted sport by the general public in Charlotte.¹²⁶ The greater Charlotte region and Carolinas in general have hosted some of the largest races on the NASCAR Strictly Stock Series calendar and have produced some of the largest sponsors and players in the sport. For instance, Enoch Staley of Wilkesboro, North Carolina, became Bill France's right-hand man in the early 1950s and opened several raceways with the founder, and Humpy Wheeler, long time president of Charlotte Motor Speedway, was born in Belmont, North Carolina, and currently lives in Huntersville, North Carolina.¹²⁷ Sponsors like Firestone Tire and Rubber Company and STP, a motor oil company, found a niche

¹²⁶ A 1994 business brochure published by The Carolinas Partnership promoted both the Hornets NBA team and Carolina Panthers NFL team, both founded in the 1990s (The Panthers would not play their first game until 1995). The brochure notes that Charlotte had the fifth largest airline hub and was the third largest financial center in the US. The list of major companies within the City included on the brochure do not include any motorsports related companies. There is a brief note that Charlotte hosts the Coca-Cola 600 every year as the second most-attended single day event in the country, though the same bullet point includes other local attractions such as Carowinds and Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden. Likewise, the Charlotte Chamber's Annual Report has a section titled "Quality of Life" in which they list all of the sports teams in Charlotte, including the as yet non-established professional soccer team; there is no mention of NASCAR on this list. *Charlotte Region: America's New Business Horizon.*; "Charlotte in Detail," *Charlotte Chamber*, Jan. 2020, https://charlottebusinessresources.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Charlotte_in_Detail.pdf.

¹²⁷ Daniel S. Pierce, 87.; "Stock Car Pioneer, Enoch Staley, 77, Dies," *News & Record*, May 22, 1995, https://greensboro.com/stock-car-pioneer-enoch-staley-77-dies/article_5ae229ba-3129-511b-afde-521c4eba1df4.html.

area to test and promote their products. NASCAR was able to create hundreds of jobs through the creation of more and more teams, while being able to put hundreds of thousands of dollars of revenue into local economies each race weekend. Many former NASCAR pros, like Rick Hendrick, eventually make their way to owning car dealerships in the Charlotte area, furthering the economic impact. However, there are three main areas that NASCAR has an economic impact on Charlotte: the Hall of Fame, Charlotte Motor Speedway, and motorsport related industries in the Charlotte region.

Despite the NASCAR Hall of Fame's somewhat rocky start in the Queen City with visitor numbers lower than anticipated in its inaugural year, as of 2019 the museum had a roughly \$58.3 million economic impact on the city, with visitors traveling an average of 564 miles to get to the city. In addition, visitors averaged a three-day overnight trip, with approximately 37 percent of visitors coming to Charlotte with the primary intention of visiting the Hall. These visitors also averaged an expenditure of \$830 per party in the city, though a 2012 study indicated visitors spent an average of \$1,200 during their stay, as well as 50 percent of visitors coming with the main goal of seeing the Hall of Fame. The NASCAR Hall of Fame had over 275,000 visitors during its first full year in operation, with the number of visitors coming in second only to the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York.¹²⁸ Though the Queen City is not dependent on tourism for its main source of revenue, this is a significant number. The Panthers NFL team and Hornets NBA team only operate for a few months out of the

¹²⁸ *2019 Annual Report* (Charlotte: Charlotte Regional Visitors Authority, Nov. 27, 2019), 5.; "Motorsports in Charlotte, NC is Major Driver of Economic Development," *LivAbility*, Feb. 21, 2012, <https://livability.com/nc/charlotte/experiences-adventures/motorsports-in-charlotte-nc-is-major-driver-of-economic>.

year, giving NASCAR an edge when it comes to the numbers due to the continual presence of the Hall of Fame. However, it is difficult to compare the number of visitors to Charlotte for Panthers' or Hornets' games to the number of visitors for NASCAR races, as the stadiums themselves have different restrictions and limited seating. For instance, Bank of America Stadium (home to the Panthers) holds close to 75,000 fans while Charlotte Motor Speedway holds seats for 95,000 fans, though attendees noted that upward of 130,000 fans were present at the Coca-Cola 600 on May 30, 2021 due to the space available in the infield.¹²⁹ The number of visitors to the NASCAR Hall of Fame has grown since the inaugural year, which is partially attributed to the Hall's staff increased awareness of Charlotte's largely middle-class population, with exhibits designed with diverse demographic engagement in mind. Because this middle-class population is not the primary demographic drawn to NASCAR as a sport and by extension its other attractions like the Hall, spaces like the Hall are an instrumental way of growing both knowledge and the fan-base of the sport. More traditional NASCAR forums like Charlotte Motor Speedway are still a large factor of the economic and cultural impacts of motorsports on Charlotte, but the Hall of Fame reaches demographics that would not feel quite at home at the Speedway due to stereotypes surrounding the sport as a white, southern, and lower-class sport, continuing the original narrative of NASCAR as a working-class sport.

Charlotte Motor Speedway has been reported to generate \$451 million in economic impact annually and 726 direct employees, both full time and temporary

¹²⁹ "Stadium Facts," Carolina Panthers, <https://www.panthers.com/stadium/facts>.; "Track Facts," Charlotte Motor Speedway.; Amber Thompson, in conversation with author, June 7, 2021.

positions, as of 2019.¹³⁰ In 2016, the Coca-Cola 600 generated \$230 million alone in its economic impact, with 4,200 temporary jobs being created for the race weekend.¹³¹ In addition to the impact of that one specific race, there is a three-day long festival held in Uptown Charlotte (traditionally held on Tryon Street, though the festival is now moving to Romare Bearden Park to give more of a racetrack feel) called the 600 Festival and Circle K Speed Street. In the three-day time span, the festival generates \$58 million in economic impact for the city alone, with over 400,000 visitors.¹³² The number of visitors for the race and festival preceding it has remained constant with the exception of 2020 due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, though the festivities resumed in 2021. The revenue generated by this one race and all of its festivities merits the attention and admiration of the Queen City, and its history should be more celebrated than it actually is by Charlotteans. The lack of celebration is mostly due to the stereotype that NASCAR is a working-class sport, while the majority of Charlotteans are middle- or upper-class (based off the median household income of \$62,817 in 2019) and do not wish to be associated with such stereotypes.¹³³ Many teams and manufacturers attend the festival,

¹³⁰ Laura Williams-Tracy, “An economic driver beyond just racing at Charlotte Motor Speedway,” *Charlotte Business Journal* (Sept. 13, 2019), <https://www.bizjournals.com/charlotte/news/2019/09/13/an-economic-driver-beyond-racing-at-charlotte.html>.

¹³¹ “Economic boost from NASCAR race a welcome sight for Charlotte,” WBTV (May 22, 2016), <https://www.wbvtv.com/story/32033907/economic-boost-from-nascar-race-a-welcome-sight-for-charlotte/>.

¹³² Katherine Peralta, “Circle K to be new Speed Street sponsor,” *The Charlotte Observer* (April 10, 2015), <https://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/business/article18086900.html>.; Alex Cason and Melissa Oyler, “Big changes to Speed Street, including a new location – and everything is free again,” *Charlotte Five*, February 25, 2020, <https://www.charlotteobserver.com/charlottefive/c5-things-to-do/article240520186.html>

¹³³ “Charlotte, North Carolina,” United States Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/charlottecitynorthcarolina>.

doing meet-and-greets and handing out freebies. With so many teams and manufacturers in the area, it is not difficult to spend hours attempting to see everything the festival has to offer.

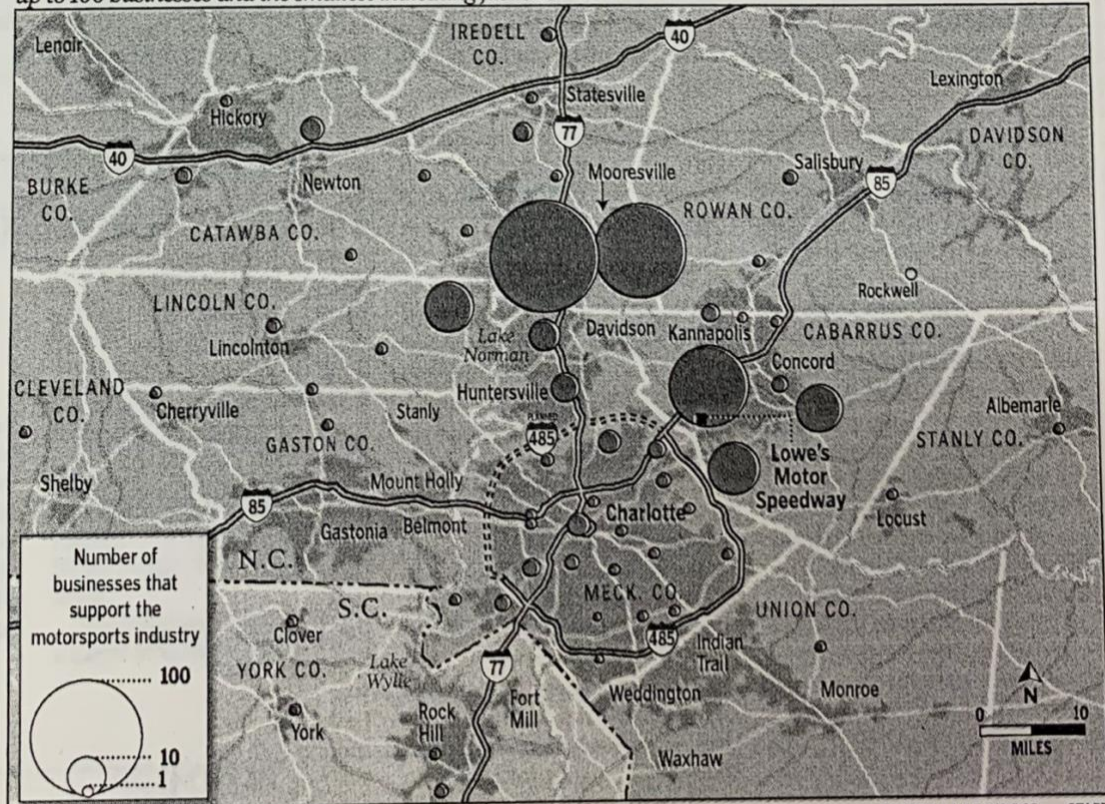
As of 2004, there were more than 400 (almost 700 by 2012) motorsports related businesses in the Charlotte region, 90 percent of NASCAR teams in the Charlotte region, and 2,750 motorsports industry jobs in the Charlotte region (over 20,000 by 2012, exemplifying exponential growth of the motorsports industry in the Queen City), the majority being in the Mooresville and Concord areas where teams are located (Figure 6.1).¹³⁴ Likewise, the motorsports industry in the state of North Carolina in 2003 had 12,292 jobs directly related to the motorsports industry, created 24,406 new jobs in North Carolina, and generated over \$5 billion in revenue (a steady figure for at least the last twenty years), with salaries for those in the motorsports industry in the top 3.6 percent of highest earnings.¹³⁵ As the exponential growth of job opportunities in the industry continues to rise, so does the concentration of motorsports businesses within the Charlotte area.

¹³⁴ Weir, “Lincoln’s low-key racing.”; “Motorsports in Charlotte, NC is Major Driver of Economic Development,” *LivAbility*.

¹³⁵ John Connaughton, et al., “The Economic Impacts of the Motorsports Industry on the North Carolina Economy” (Charlotte: UNC Charlotte Belk College of Business Administration, Oct. 2004).

Motorsports-Related Businesses Around Charlotte

The Charlotte Regional Partnership estimates the region has more than 400 motorsports-related businesses. They are grouped by zipcode below, with the largest circles representing up to 100 businesses and the smallest indicating just one.



SOURCE: Ted Mellnik, Charlotte Regional Partnership

MICHELLE HAZELWOOD — STAFF

Figure 6.1 “Motorsports Related Businesses Around Charlotte,” *The Charlotte Observer*, May 28, 2004, D2.

In comparison, the Carolina Panthers National Football League franchise has an economic impact of \$636 million per annum, creating only 6,300 jobs.¹³⁶ The Charlotte Hornets National Basketball League, owned by all-star Michael Jordan, generates \$215 million in revenue as of 2020 (a small portion of which goes to the city), with the only definitive economic impact being for the NBA All-Star game – a game which does not necessarily include the Hornets.¹³⁷ The impact of the All-Star weekend is estimated to be \$100 million, less than half of the impact created by the Coca-Cola 600.¹³⁸ The Charlotte Checkers professional hockey team is another sport that does not have an easily identifiable economic impact on the Charlotte region, though their annual revenue as a company is a mere \$1.26 million.¹³⁹ The Charlotte Knights Minor League Baseball team has an estimated annual revenue of between \$10 and \$12 million, after having built a \$55 million stadium in Uptown Charlotte in the mid-2010s, moving from Fort Mill, South Carolina, where annual revenue was only \$4 million.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Marvin Beach, “Study Shows Carolina Panthers Generate \$636 Million Annual Economic Impact,” WCCB Charlotte, Dec. 19, 2017, <https://www.wccbcharlotte.com/2017/12/19/study-shows-panthers-generate-636-million-annual-economic-impact/>.

¹³⁷ “NBA Team Valuation,” *Forbes*, Feb. 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/teams/charlotte-hornets/?sh=2fec0cc3364f>.

¹³⁸ “NBA All-Star 2019 Leaves Lasting Impacts on City of Charlotte,” Charlotte Regional Visitors Authority, Feb. 21, 2019, <http://www.crva.com/news/nba-all-star-2019-leaves-lasting-impacts-city-charlotte>.

¹³⁹ “Charlotte Checkers Professional Ice Hockey LLC,” Dun & Bradstreet, https://www.dnb.com/business-directory/company-profiles.charlotte_checkers_professional_ice_hockey_llc.9aaf9029938a361880f5edb2eb447cae.html.

¹⁴⁰ Kevin Reichard, “Knights make economic case for city funding of new ballpark,” *Ballpark Digest*, Mar. 2, 2012, <https://ballparkdigest.com/201203024564/minor-league-baseball/news/knights-make-economic-case-for-city-funding-of-new-ballpark>.

While all of the revenue brought in by the various sports is instrumental to the success of Charlotte as a major (and minor) league sports hub, comparing the numbers show NASCAR has the greatest impact annually. The impact is astounding and makes one question why native Charlotteans do not laud NASCAR as much as other sports like the Panthers or Hornets, while city leadership and media do. Part of the answer is the negative connotations and stereotypes surrounding auto racing and its origins, while another is that there are simply other and potentially more engaging ways to utilize leisure time than there were when NASCAR started. The Hall of Fame seeks to remedy these issues by engaging demographics other than those typically associated with NASCAR by reworking the traditional auto racing and NASCAR narratives through focusing on STEM aspects of the sport rather than making the Hall all about NASCAR's history; the continuing issue, however, is convincing enough non-fans to visit the Hall and promote NASCAR as just as fun and engaging as other sports like football or baseball. Despite Figure 6.1 being almost twenty years old, there is still a high concentration of motorsports related businesses, including NASCAR specific businesses and teams, in the same general areas. Some of the teams have moved since 2004, though others have moved into the Charlotte area since.

CONCLUSION

While the heart of NASCAR may not have originated in the Queen City, that is where it lies today. The majority of the factors leading to NASCAR calling Charlotte home trace back to the city's geography. Not only is red clay abundant in the Piedmont, but it was also critical for the earlier races in the early and mid-1900s. Without the clay, racing would not have taken hold in the South to the degree that it has. Additionally, the Queen City sits directly in the center of the Eastern Seaboard, making it convenient for team travel. Charlotte's rapid growth in the 1980s as a banking center, the second largest in the country, led to the rapid growth of Charlotte-Douglas International Airport, which in turn led to the growth of businesses in the Charlotte area; all of these factors played a part in the continuing success of NASCAR within the Queen City.

After NASCAR had unofficially moved from Atlanta to Charlotte in the late 1940s following the conflict between city officials and NASCAR leadership at Lakewood Park, the manufacturing groups made their way to Charlotte as well, following where racing efforts were strongest. Because manufacturers and larger teams like Holman-Moody did decide to move to Charlotte, other teams followed suit so that they might be closer to their suppliers and any parts they might need. Unlike the NFL or NBA, over 90 percent of NASCAR teams reside in one city, Charlotte. This is unheard of in other sports and makes NASCAR and Charlotte both unique. This large pocket of teams and manufacturers has turned into a billion-dollar industry and has made Charlotte one of only two cities in the United States where motorsports is an actual industry. While the

industry took decades to grow, there was no shortage of ambitious men like Bruton Smith and Curtis Turner, looking for opportunities to expand, and thus resulting in Charlotte Motor Speedway, one of the premier automobile racing facilities in the nation.

Because of so many teams' decision to call Charlotte home as well as NASCAR's decision to make Charlotte its unofficial capital after the first Strictly Stock race ran in Charlotte in 1949, it made logical sense that the area held a monumental racetrack as well. Though by no means the first racetrack in Charlotte, Charlotte Motor Speedway was, and is, the largest of them, spanning 2,000 acres and boasting multiple tracks, a drag strip, condos, camping areas, offices, and restaurants. As such, Charlotte Motor Speedway is a premier racing facility within NASCAR. Proximity to a large airport and the majority, over 90 percent, of NASCAR's teams placed the Speedway in the perfect position. The Speedway holds the sport's longest race, the Coca-Cola 600, the All-Star race, and the newest race, the Bank of America 400 ROVAL. The specific races held at the Speedway coupled with its firsts, such as the first speedway to host night racing after Humpy Wheeler initiated a new lighting system, has placed this particular speedway and therefore the city it resides in in a national light and draws thousands of race fans every year.

Additionally, the NASCAR Hall of Fame is the only hall of fame in Charlotte and is the only hall of fame devoted entirely to NASCAR in the United States. The city owns and operates the museum, with NASCAR only licensing the Hall of Fame and providing minimal guidance. Studies by the city have shown that, as of 2012, almost 50 percent of Charlotte visitors come with the main goal of visiting the NASCAR Hall of Fame. Charlotte employed a world-renowned architect, I.M. Pei, to design the Hall, resulting in

a modern and sleek building that adds to the cityscape and has become an icon amongst Charlotteans. Enlisting such a prominent architect and ensuring that the city would foot the bill to pay for the Hall led to Charlotte winning the honor of housing the Hall.

NASCAR continually sees shifts in fanbase for varying reasons. While the early days of the sport focused on the drivers themselves and leadership, today's NASCAR puts more emphasis on the technological advances found within the motorsports industry. The NASCAR Hall of Fame, over the last ten years, has assisted with both aspects by presenting both a historical narrative on the sport's players and a STEM based narrative. While Charlotte spent a great deal of money in securing and building the Hall of Fame, NASCAR has made the city's financial return worth it.

The motorsports industry in general creates over \$6 billion in revenue annually for North Carolina, with one race weekend in Charlotte creating over \$230 million in revenue for the Queen City. In contrast, the NBA All-Star weekend held in Charlotte annually only creates \$100 million in revenue, despite the fact that NASCAR is technically less popular than many of the other professional sports in the area. However, NASCAR was the only professional sport in Charlotte until 1976 with the institution of the Charlotte Knights Minor League Baseball team, making NASCAR the oldest sport in the city and therefore one of its more critical sports in establishing Charlotte as a sports hub.

NASCAR historians have continued to overlook this monumental connection between NASCAR and Charlotte, with only mentions of the first Strictly Stock race and red clay floating through their respective narratives. Without Charlotte, NASCAR would not be in the national position it is in today. Movies about NASCAR used Charlotte as

the main center for filming locations, fans pour billions of dollars into the sport and North Carolina annually, and hundreds of thousands of fans make pilgrimages to races across the country and especially the three in Charlotte. NASCAR has taken up unofficial headquarters in Charlotte since the opening of the NASCAR Hall of Fame in 2010, with more executive located in the Queen City than Daytona Beach, the official home of NASCAR. Despite all of these facts, NASCAR does not receive the recognition it so rightfully deserves in the scope of Charlotte's history, and Charlotte does not receive the recognition it so rightfully deserves in the scope of NASCAR's history, an intertwined history which this thesis shined a spotlight on.

Because of Andy Thompson, I endeavored to shine a spotlight on the intertwined histories of Charlotte and NASCAR. Charlotte's unique geological factors coupled with its possession of over 90 percent of NASCAR teams, prominent auto racing facility, and Hall of Fame continue to highlight Thompson's story and thousands of others that come together to showcase a robust and often overlooked communal history. These stories continue to thrive within Charlotte, though often overlooked by the public. Amber Thompson, Thompson's granddaughter, continues on Andy Thompson's legacy of painting at the racetrack on race day, designing and painting a mural for Coca-Cola Consolidated in a thoroughfare; Dale Earnhardt, Jr. continues Dale Earnhardt, Sr.'s legacy as one of the great drivers in NASCAR history; and the NASCAR Hall of Fame continues the legacy of Big Bill France and his vision for a treasured American pastime.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

2019 Annual Report. Charlotte: Charlotte Regional Visitors Authority, November 27, 2019.

“About the Hall.” NASCAR Hall of Fame. Charlotte Regional Visitors Authority. March 18, 2020. <https://www.nascarhall.com/about-the-hall>.

“Available Real Estate.” Daytona Beach International Airport. <http://www.flydaytonafirst.com/about-dab/available-real-estate.stml>.

“Aviation Department.” The City of Charlotte. [https://charlottenc.gov/aviation/Pages/default.aspx#:~:text=Charlotte%20Douglas%20International%20Airport%20\(CLT\)%20was%20established%20in%201935%20and,Douglas%20International%20Airport%20in%20](https://charlottenc.gov/aviation/Pages/default.aspx#:~:text=Charlotte%20Douglas%20International%20Airport%20(CLT)%20was%20established%20in%201935%20and,Douglas%20International%20Airport%20in%20).

Cason, Alex, and Melissa Oyler. “Big changes to Speed Street, including a new location – and everything is free again.” Charlotte Five. *The Charlotte Observer*. February 25, 2020. <https://www.charlotteobserver.com/charlottefive/c5-things-to-do/article240520186.html>.

“Charlotte Checkers Professional Ice Hockey LLC.” *Dun & Bradstreet*. https://www.dnb.com/business-directory/company-profiles.charlotte_checkers_professional_ice_hockey_llc.9aaf9029938a361880f5edb2eb447cae.html.

“Charlotte in Detail.” *Charlotte Chamber*. January 2020. https://charlottebusinessresources.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Charlotte_in_Detail.pdf.

“Charlotte, North Carolina.” United States Census Bureau. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/charlottecitynorthcarolina>.

The Charlotte Observer Historical Newspapers. *The Charlotte Observer* Archives, Charlotte, NC.

City of Charlotte Finance Department. 2010 Annual Report. Accessed October 8, 2020.

Connaughton, John, et al. "The Economic Impacts of the Motorsports Industry on the North Carolina Economy." Charlotte: UNC Charlotte Belk College of Business Administration, October 2004.

"Dale Jr.: Glory Road Champions," NASCAR Hall of Fame,
<https://www.nascarhall.com/explore/exhibits/glory-road-champions>.

"Daytona 500 facts & figures." *Orlando Sentinel*. February 19, 2005.
<https://www.orlandosentinel.com/sports/nascar/orl-spt-car-daytona500facts-htmlstory.html>.

Drive for Diversity." NASCAR. <https://www.nascar.com/diversity/>.

"Earnhardt Legend ends at Daytona." *The Charlotte Observer*. February 19, 2001. 6A-8A.

"Economic boost from NASCAR race a welcome sight for Charlotte." *WBTV*. May 22, 2016. <https://www.wbvtv.com/story/32033907/economic-boost-from-nascar-race-a-welcome-sight-for-charlotte/>.

"Hall of Fame Members." International Motorsports Hall of Fame.
<https://www.motorsportshalloffame.com/hall-of-fame-members/>.

"History." Holman-Moody. <http://www.holmanmoody.com/history.html>.

"List of NASCAR Racing Teams." NASCAR. <https://www.nascar.com/racing-teams>.

McGee, Ryan. "NASCAR and Hollywood were never the same after 'Days of Thunder.'" ESPN. June 29, 2020.
https://www.espn.com/racing/nascar/story/_/id/29364669/nascar-hollywood-were-never-same-days-thunder.

"Motorsports Hall of Fame of America moving from Detroit to Daytona International Speedway." Fox News. January 24, 2014.
<https://www.foxnews.com/sports/motorsports-hall-of-fame-of-america-moving-from-detroit-to-daytona-international-speedway>.

- “Motorsports in Charlotte, NC is Major Driver of Economic Development.” *LivAbility*. February 21, 2012. <https://livability.com/nc/charlotte/experiences-adventures/motorsports-in-charlotte-nc-is-major-driver-of-economic>.
- “NASCAR announces changes to NASCAR Hall of Fame induction process.” NASCAR. February 5, 2020. <https://www.nascar.com/news-media/2020/02/05/nascar-announces-changes-to-nascar-hall-of-fame-induction-process/>.
- “NASCAR Hall of Fame Inductees.” NASCAR Hall of Fame. <https://www.nascarhall.com/hall-of-famers/inductees>.
- “NASCAR Hall of Fame Induction Process.” *NASCAR Hall of Fame*. <https://www.nascarhall.com/hall-of-famers/process>.
- “NASCAR History.” NASCAR. Accessed August 30, 2020. <https://www.nascar.com/nascar-history>.
- “NBA All-Star 2019 Leaves Lasting Impacts on City of Charlotte.” *Charlotte Regional Visitors Authority*. February 21, 2019. <http://www.crva.com/news/nba-all-star-2019-leaves-lasting-impacts-city-charlotte>.
- “NBA Team Valuation.” *Forbes*. February 2021. <https://www.forbes.com/teams/charlotte-hornets/?sh=2fec0cc3364f>.
- “An Oral History of Black NASCAR Drivers.” Complex. February 22, 2012. <https://www.complex.com/sports/2012/02/an-oral-history-of-black-nascar-drivers/>.
- Peralta, Katherine. “Circle K to be new Speed Street sponsor.” *The Charlotte Observer*. April 10, 2015. <https://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/business/article18086900.html>.
- Reichard, Kevin “Knights make economic case for city funding of new ballpark.” *Ballpark Digest*. March 2, 2012. <https://ballparkdigest.com/201203024564/minor-league-baseball/news/knights-make-economic-case-for-city-funding-of-new-ballpark>.
- “Stadium Facts.” Carolina Panthers. <https://www.panthers.com/stadium/facts>.

Siano, Joseph. "Lights, Action, Nascar: Charlotte's New Nightspot: A Thousand Bulbs, a Long Oval and a Bright Future for Tracks." *New York Times*. 1992. See esp. sec. Sports Monday.

"Stock Car Pioneer, Enoch Staley, 77, Dies." *News & Record*. May 22, 1995.
https://greensboro.com/stock-car-pioneer-enoch-staley-77-dies/article_5ae229ba-3129-511b-afde-521c4eba1df4.html.

"Strategic Plan." Charlotte-Douglas International Airport.
<https://www.cltairport.com/community/commercial-development/strategic-plan/>.

Stock Car Racing Collection. Appalachian State University Libraries Special Collections Research Center, Boone, North Carolina.

"Tickets & Combo Packages." NASCAR Hall of Fame.
<https://www.nascarhall.com/tickets#packages>.

"Track Facts." Charlotte Motor Speedway.
<https://www.charlottemotorspeedway.com/fans/track-facts/>.

"Track History." Charlotte Motor Speedway.
<https://www.charlottemotorspeedway.com/fans/track-history/>.

Weir, Kytja. "Lincoln's low-key racing." *The Charlotte Observer*. May 28, 2004.

Wheeler, H.A. "Humpy." Interview by Daniel S. Pierce. July 27, 2005. The Dan Pierce NASCAR Oral History Collection, University of North Carolina Asheville Ramsey Library Special Collections and University Archives.
http://toto.lib.unca.edu/findingaids/oralhistory/NASCAR/wheeler_humpy.pdf.

Williams-Tracy, Laura. "An economic driver beyond just racing at Charlotte Motor Speedway." *Charlotte Business Journal*. September 13, 2019.
<https://www.bizjournals.com/charlotte/news/2019/09/13/an-economic-driver-beyond-racing-at-charlotte.html>.

Woods, Walter. "NASCAR Hall of Fame: Charlotte sees racing hall as key to tourism growth." *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. August 17, 2005.

SECONDARY SOURCES

"1957-The first crest of the performance wave!" *Automotive History Preservation Society*. <http://wildaboutcarsonline.com/cgi->

bin/pub9990327521141.cgi?categoryid=9990477144469&action=viewad&itemid=9990477149058.

Acedera, Shane. "The History of Female Drivers in NASCAR." *Sport ONE*. November 8, 2018. <https://sport.one/the-history-of-female-drivers-in-nascar/>.

Beach, Marvin. "Study Shows Carolina Panthers Generate \$636 Million Annual Economic Impact." *WCCB Charlotte*. December 19, 2017. <https://www.wccbcharlotte.com/2017/12/19/study-shows-panthers-generate-636-million-annual-economic-impact/>.

Bell, Mike. "Racing roots run deep in Hall County's red clay." *WDUN*. May 13, 2020. <https://accesswdun.com/article/2020/5/902714/racing-roots-run-deep-in-hall-countys-red-clay>.

Charlotte, NC: The Global Evolution of a New South City. Ed. William Graves and Heather A. Smith. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010. See esp. chap. 3, "Red Dust and Dynamometers: Charlotte as Memory and Knowledge Community in NASCAR."

Clarke, Liz. "Death of Dale Earnhardt 10 years ago changed NASCAR, and not necessarily for the better." *The Washington Post*. February 17, 2011. https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/ten-years-after-dale-earnhardts-death-nascar-is-facing-a-checkered-future/2011/02/17/ABUEVnQ_story.html.

Close, John. "Metrolina Speedway Only Historic Charlotte Track to Still Survive." *Racing Nation*. January 16, 2012. <https://racingnation.com/metrolina-speedway-only-historic-charlotte-track-to-still-survive/>.

Daniel, Pete. "Fast and Furious." In *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute, 2000.

"Darlington Raceway Stock Car Museum & NMPA Hall of Fame." Discover South Carolina. <https://discoversouthcarolina.com/products/1425>.

"Every Black Driver in NASCAR History." Ranker Sports. June 24, 2020. <https://www.ranker.com/list/nascar-drivers-who-are-black/ranker-sports>.

"FAQs." *Richard Petty Motorsports*. Accessed October 24, 2020. <http://richardpettymotorsports.com/faqs/>.

- “First Day of Integration at Charlotte Schools.” The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Story. *Charlotte Mecklenburg Library*. <https://www.cmstory.org/exhibits/african-american-album-volume-2/1957-first-day-integration-charlotte-schools>.
- Hanchett, Tom. “The History of Charlotte.” Charlotte. City of Charlotte. Accessed August 30, 2020. <https://www.charlottesgotalot.com/articles/history/the-history-of-charlotte>.
- Howell, Mark D. *From Moonshine to Madison Avenue: A Cultural History of the NASCAR Winston Cup Series*. Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1997.
- Jack, Emily. “WBT Charlotte in the Golden Age of Radio.” NCpedia. <https://www.ncpedia.org/anchor/wbt-charlotte-golden-age>.
- Kinnan, Rob. “The real deal: Holman Moody is still around and building cars, and its latest is a reproduction of a historic ’64 Fairlane race car that would make an awesome street car.” *Hot Rod* 59, no. 5. May 2006.
- Kratt, Mary and Mary Manning Boyer. “Leisure Time: Entertainment, Clubs, Recreation, Parks, and Sports.” In *Remembering Charlotte: Postcards from a New South City, 1905-1950*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000.
- Manalo, Karlo. “These are the reasons why NASCAR is Losing Fans.” *HotCars*. June 22, 2020. <https://www.hotcars.com/these-are-the-reasons-why-nascar-is-losing-fans/>.
- McLaughlin, Matt. “Beside the Rising Tide: Hey, Where Did Everybody Go?” *FrontStretch*. February 21, 2021. <https://www.frontstretch.com/2021/02/22/beside-the-rising-tide-hey-where-did-everybody-go/>.
- Motorsports and American Culture: From Demolition Derbies to NASCAR*. Ed. Mark D. Howell and John D. Miller. Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014. See esp. chap. 5, “‘What is your Racket, Brother?’: Bootleggers, Respectable Atlanta, Bill France, and the Birth of NASCAR,” and chap. 7, “Just a Good Ol’ Gal: Pioneer Racer Louise Smith.”
- Oreovicz, John. “The Racing Heart.” *Racer* no. 151. November 2004.

- Pearce, Al. "Why Smokey Yunick is not (and may never be) in the NASCAR Hall of Fame." *Autoweek*. March 27, 2016.
https://www.autoweek.com/racing/nascar/a1842751/case-smokey-yunick/?utm_campaign=awracingweekend&utm_content=body&utm_medium=e-newsletter&utm_source=RacingWeekend20160327&utm_term=headline-top.
- Pierce, Daniel S. *Real NASCAR: White Lightning, Red Clay, and Big Bill France*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010.
- "Plan a Racing Themed Trip to Charlotte North Carolina." In Town Suites.
<https://www.intownsuites.com/plan-a-racing-themed-trip-to-charlotte-north-carolina/>.
- "Racing Schools." Charlotte Motor Speedway.
<https://www.charlottemotorspeedway.com/experiences/racing-schools/>.
- "Rick Hendrick." Hendrick Motorsports.
<http://www.hendrickmotorsports.com/about/rick-hendrick>.
- Sigo, Shelly. "Bank Loans Forgiven for NASCAR Hall of Fame." *The Bond Buyer* 1, no. 324242. January 14, 2015.
- Southers, Tim. "Where are they now? Rick Mast reflects on NASCAR career." *Motorsport.com*. January 17, 2017. <https://us.motorsport.com/nascar-cup/news/where-are-they-now-rick-mast-reflects-on-nascar-career-866351/3011645/>.
- "Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby Filming and Production." *International Movie Database*. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0415306/locations>.
- "Visit Us." Hendrick Motorsports. Accessed October 24, 2020.
<http://www.hendrickmotorsports.com/about/visit>.
- Williams, Deb. *Charlotte Motor Speedway: Images of Modern America*. Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2017.