JUNETEENTH BIKE RIDE CHAMPAIGN-URBANA

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INTRODUCTION
Bicycling in America is often viewed as a white middle-class activity. The sport of cycling is also predominantly white worldwide. Access to equipment and infrastructure can be attributed to this fact. Bicycling gear is continuously getting expensive. Expensive gear were once associated with the only the sport of bicycling. However, with recent green technology that convert and save kinetic energy from bicycle tires, leisure cycling gear have also experienced an increase in price. Within cities, Champaign for example, bicycle infrastructure is inadequate in poor minority neighborhoods. Inadequate infrastructure creates safety issues for riders from and in these neighborhoods. Contemporary bicycle advocacy is seldom involved in addressing the cultural and economic disparities of cycling. Community groups have thus found a way to connect people in poor underserved neighborhoods with cycling through their own history.

MAJOR TAYLOR
Marshall Walter “Major” Taylor was the first African American athlete, and second black American world champion in any sport (African American Registry). He win the world 1-mile cycling championship and American sprint champion both in 1899 (African American Registry). He was mostly recognized overseas, especially in France. His career in the United States was plagued with racism, which was worse in the Southern states where he was banned from competing against Caucasians. Taylor retired at the age of thirty because he was tired of racism in domestic competition (Taylor, 1929).

IRON RIDERS
The US Army’s 26th infantry division aka Iron Riders were the first and only U.S military troop ever deployed via bicycles. They were buffalo soldiers who conducted drills and exercises on wheels in the 1890s. They rode 100-pound bicycles into Northern Montana on muddy trails and toured Yellowstone. Iron Riders also rode over 1,800 miles from Ft. Missoula to St. Louis, crossing over the Rocky Mountains and Great Plains. Before entering St. Louis, they were approached by about 1,000 civilian bicyclists who rode out to escort them into town in a parade (Sorensen, 2012).
UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

The Underground Railroad is a 2,100-mile bicycle route that approximately traces the path travelled by enslaved African Americans seeking freedom (Bleyer, 2009). Enslaved African Americans used these paths to escape into free states. These enslaved Americans were helped along the way by free Americans, often referred to as sympathetic or abolitionists, who hid them in their outbuildings and homes (Sullivan). Many paths followed rivers, and ended up in Canada. The 2,100-mile bicycle route celebrates diversity, promotes health, and highlights the historic cultural struggle of America’s past (Sullivan). The bicycle route was created as a result of a partnership between the Adventure Cycling Association – a non-profit that promotes bicycle touring – and the Center for Minority Health at the University of Pittsburgh graduate school of public health. The partnership occurred in 2004 (Sullivan).

At the time, University of Pittsburgh’s Center for Minority Health was looking for innovative ways to promote physical activity in their outreach programs. The Center for Minority Health had also just been introduced to the Adventure Cycling Association whose mission is to inspire people to travel by bicycle, and explore the landscapes and history of America for fitness, fun and self-discovery (Sullivan). Seizing the opportunity, University of Pittsburgh’s Center for Minority Health proposed to the Adventure Cycling Association their idea for a new long-distance bicycle route honoring the original Underground Railroad. After the creation of the partnership between the Adventure Cycling Association and the Center for Minority Health at the University of Pittsburgh in 2004, both parties worked together to map the route from Mobile, Alabama to Owen Sound, Ontario, with stops in between that depict the story of the slave trade and highlight escape routes (Bleyer, 2009). While mapping the 2,100-mile bicycle route, the partnership held conversations with Underground Railroad historians and organizations dedicated to the authentication and preservation of the Underground Railroad story and site such as the National Park Service’s Network to Freedom program (Sullivan).

In February 2007, Adventure Cycling Association and University of Pittsburgh’s Center for Minority Health jointly announced the creation of their 2,100-mile Underground Railroad bicycle route. Since 2007, more than 4,500 maps of the route have been sold (Bleyer, 2009). According to Bleyer (2009), this supports planners arguments that cycling’s growing popularity is not just due to recreation but also because cycling has become a dynamic way to experience history. The Underground Railroad is not one of America’s popular histories because the free Americans along the Underground Railroad – aka “abolitionists” or “sympathetic Americans” or “conductors” – who helped hide runaway enslaved Americans seldom revealed to their family and children the details of their doings. Bleyer (2009) believes this is “an omission that bespoke the secrecy that surrounded the highly dangerous enterprise.” (Bleyer, 2009: 1)

CONTEMPORARY BICYCLE STATISTICS

According to Sullivan, “bicycling is the most popular outdoor recreation activity in America.” Data show the popularity of bicycling in America has increased significantly within the past decade. From 1999 to 2009, commuting by bicycle increased by 64% while 54% of all bicycle trips was transportation related (Visua.ly, 2013).

![Chart I: Growth in the Percent of All Trips That Are by Bike (2001-2009)](Sierra Club, 2013)

![Chart II: Average Percent of Commute Trips by Bike in 2010](Sierra Club, 2013)
Chart I shows that African American bike ridership grew 100% from 2001 – 2009. However, “African Americans make up only 6% of the cycling population” (Sullivan), and according to Chart II African Americans have the lowest average percent of commute trips by bike in 2010. Inferring from the above-mentioned data and reflecting on cycling as a sport, fewer African Americans cycle for leisure, commuting, and professional competition. Regardless of current trends, African American history has had a connection with cycling that is often not touched upon by biking advocates in their respective campaigns.

One reason for the increased popularity of cycling in America is because 47% of Americans, according to the Outdoor Industry Association, are volleys for more bicycle friendly areas in their neighborhoods (Visua.ly, 2013). As a result, communities have responded by creating bike-sharing programs. For example, New York City’s bike program has 7,000 bicycles and 420 stations, Chicago’s bike program has 3,000 bikes and 300 stations, while Washington DC’s program has 3,700 bikes and 330 stations (Visua.ly, 2013). However, while transportation options are increasing within city neighborhoods, “many communities of color in that same city are in transit deserts that lack safe streets for walking or biking” (Sierra Club, 2013). There are safety ramifications for cyclists in neighborhoods without appropriate bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure such that according to 2001 data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the fatality rate for African-American bicyclists was 30% higher than that of white bicyclists (Sierra Club, 2013).

Organizations like Adventure Cycling Association and University of Pittsburgh’s Center for Minority Health are aware of the racial disparities within cycling. For such organizations eliminating ethnic disparities requires scientifically sound and culturally appropriate methods (Sullivan). Other local community groups trying to address the issue of ethnic disparities in cycling are beginning to adopt cultural appropriateness in their outreach programs (Sierra Club, 2013). For example:

- Red, Bike and Green, a community-building collective addresses health, economic, and environmental disparities affecting black neighborhoods across America by connecting like-minded Black urban cyclists in different cities (Red Bike and Green).
- Multicultural Communities for Mobility produces Spanish-language public service announcements and provides bike parking for immigrant workers in Los Angeles (Sierra Club, 2013).

According to data from the Sierra club (2013), young people are embracing walk-able and bik-able lifestyles in lieu of getting their drivers license. The Sierra club asserts that youth, women, and people of colour are playing a significant role in making America more bicycle friendly because these previously underrepresented groups continue to embrace bicycling at a high rate. As a result, the way in which transportation is viewed and planned for in America is undergoing certain changes. In the past, planners have excluded African Americans during the planning process for developments that impact urban neighborhoods (Sierra Club, 2013). Hopefully, efforts such as LifeCykle and programs such as Juneteenth Freedom Ride can increase inclusionary transportation planning locally in Champaign – Urbana.

Image source: Red Bike & Green.
JUNETEENTH FREEDOM RIDE

Juneteenth is the oldest known celebration commemorating the end of slavery in the U.S State of Texas on June 19th 1865, two and half years after President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. Champaign – Urbana and other communities often celebrate Juneteenth on June 16th depending on if June 19th is a weekday. Champaign-Urbana celebrated Juneteenth for years as part of “Champaign-Urbana Days” until Champaign Park District took it over (eBlack CU). In 2012 Champaign – Urbana celebrated Juneteenth through biking and the event is called a Freedom Ride. Inspired by the Underground Railroad bicycle route, the Freedom Ride takes riders through local neighborhoods and other destinations relevant to African American history in Champaign and Urbana. Michael Burns, PhD organized the first Champaign – Urbana Juneteenth Freedom Ride in 2012 with the help of Don Moyer Boys and Girls Club, The Bike Project, and Professor Ken Salo. Michael Burns also participated in hosting the 2013 Freedom Ride, however in 2013 the Freedom Ride also became associated with Rafiki Muktar Kojo's LifeCykle Bike Co-op.

LIFECYKLE

LifeCykle is a community bike co-op in North Champaign, IL owned and operated by Rafiki Muktar Kojo, and his wife Nia-Vanessa Hall. LifeCykle offers free bicycle check up and mechanical fix up to any and everybody that walks through their doors. They rely on the help of volunteers in order to operate. The couples mission is to make cycling a way of life for residents in their immediate community – Champaign, IL. They believe that when an individual owns a bike, the individual gains the freedom to explore and experience their environment. As a result, they have set out to make bicycles available to the underserved population of their community, most especially the North End neighborhoods of Champaign, IL.

Rafiki’s Interview and plans.

During the summer months of 2013, I spent time at LifeCykle and spoke with Rafiki on multiple occasions. Based on our discussions, his vision for LifeCykle are as follows: LifeCykle’s major goal is to teach youth how to adapt, adjust, and improvise via using the bicycle as the means of achieving this goal. Rafiki wants to teach the youth, most especially African American youth in North Champaign neighborhoods, how to create their own options rather than living according to options already given to them or perceived to have been given to them. After creating their own options, Rafiki wants young people to make choices while trying to choose the best option.

LifeCykle operates on a “Learn from doing” philosophy. House rules at LifeCykle require everyone seeking mechanical or maintenance assistance to participate in attending to their bicycles along side Rafiki, Nia-Vanessa, or other LifeCykle volunteers. Rafiki’s justification for the “Learn from doing” philosophy is that it teaches cyclists about their bikes and about how to fix and/or maintain their bikes, which also prepares cyclists for emergencies especially those that happen in areas without access to a bike repair shop. Cyclists who visit LifeCykle also learn about bicycle tools, which tools they need to have during long trips, and how to improvise when they have inadequate tools. The “Learn from doing” house rules also relate directly to why LifeCykle offers free bicycle maintenance and mechanical repair. Rafiki is interested in impacting bicyclists who visit his co-op with the knowledge and ability to adapt, adjust, and improvise.

A reoccurring theme in my discussions with Rafiki is freedom. He wants LifeCykle to serve as a free workspace for “doing and creating.” Rafiki also wants to build on The Juneteenth freedom ride, and would like to see LifeCykle become a space for ideas to be shared and/or worked upon by Champaign youth and their peers. Most especially, Rafiki’s objective is on LifeCykle becoming a community center. This idea is evident in his plans to include a club, class, and café (stylized as “klub” “klass” and “kafé” – following the “LifeCykle” stylization). Rafiki would like to achieve this community center status not just in name. He wants his bike shop to become a landmark for the residents in his neighborhood. He mentioned that LifeCykle would achieve its desire of becoming a landmark when and if the bike shop is informally referred to as the “biking house” among all residents. The “biking house” is in reference to naming techniques used in lower income neighborhoods to identify houses based on the informal activities that take place within them. Rafiki explained that fun and fitness are not mutually exclusive. Therefore, the plans of including a club, class, and café in a bike shop with an annual freedom ride event can and should exist. Overall, Rafiki thrives to use LifeCykle to create a third space that
engages young people, and eliminated some of the ills of idle youth such as violence.

Rafiki Muktar Kojo describes himself as a doer, and self organized initiator who is interested in health, and happiness. His themes of helping young people create their own options through doing and creating while learning echoes Johnson's (1971) arguments that recreation also includes social and environmental forces that affect leisure time. Therefore Rafiki's efforts fit Johnson's (1971) suggestion that recreational programs ought to combat destructive forces of leisure time through short term and long term planning. This means that recreation must combat the problems of a community (Johnson, 1971). However, Rafiki feels left out or at least that the youth are left out of the planning process of their community. Richards (2011) previously discussed similar themes in her 2011 Capstone project at the University of Illinois Department of Urban and Regional Planning. According to Richards (2011), barriers that can hinder youth involvement include the following:

1. Stereotypes: Stereotypical images of youth include using public transportation ignorantly. These stereotypes can hinder the involvement of groups, including youth, in their communities (Richards, 2011).

2. Inaccessibility: Important meetings and public engagements occur at times that may be inconvenient for youth. Also language used during local government meetings (and in their campaigns) may be intimidating and jargon-like. As a result, such language can be confusing and hard to understand (Richards, 2011).

3. Powerlessness: The number of crime alert emails sent identifying young black males as the assaulters creates stereotypes and promotes racial profiling. A major indicator of powerlessness is violence. Violence asserts that power has been taken away; therefore, the use of violence serves to bring that power back (Richards, 2011).

4. Education: Public education in the United States has been faced with lack of funding, inadequate resources, overcrowding, and emphasis on standardized tests. These make students intimidated and prevent them from feeling integrated with society Richards argues (Richards, 2011).

5. Lack of appreciation of support for youth work: Youth integration is difficult, yet youth programs that exist face the additional challenge of recognition and being taken seriously. (Richards, 2011)

Summer 2012 Activities
Freedom Ride and Potluck: The Freedom Ride started from Don Moyer’s Boys and Girls Club and the event ended with a potluck dinner at the Randolph Street community garden. The Bike Project provided bicycles for participants without bikes. These bikes were transported from The Bike Project Urbana and housed at the Don Moyer Boys and Girls Club before the Freedom Ride began. The bikes were returned to The Bike Project Urbana after the potluck dinner at Randolph Street Community Garden. The Bike Project was instrumental in the inaugural ride, and have since built a relationship with LifeCykle.

Designed by: Michael Burns, PhD.

Image provided by: Ken Salo.
JUNETEENTH BIKE RIDE CHAMPAIGN – URBANA
Promoting Biking Through African American History

BIKE RIDE
Juneteenth is the oldest known celebration commemorating the end of slavery in the U.S State of Texas on June 19th 1865, 2 and half years after President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. Champaign – Urbana and other communities often celebrate Juneteenth on June 16th depending on if June 19th is a weekday. Champaign – Urbana celebrates Juneteenth through biking and the event is called a Freedom Ride. The Freedom Ride usually starts from Don Moyer's Boys and Girls Club and the event ends with a potluck dinner at the Randolph Street community garden.

VISION
- Help youth of color discover their heritage through biking
- Increase physical activity among African American youth
- Improve mental health due to increased interaction among youth
- Empower youth to cultivate a biking culture, which is also a cheap source of travel and money saver

AFRICAN AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT WITH BICYCLES
- A. Major Taylor – American Cyclist. Taylor was the first African American athlete, and second black man cycling world championship.
- B. US Army 26th infantry division (Iron Riders) – First military troop deployed via bicycles.

CULTURAL POLITIC OF BIKING IN BLACK COMMUNITIES
Perceptions: Biking within Urban Core American Cities has come to symbolize white re-population. Although black youth do ride bicycles, they may not wear helmets or ride on designated lanes thus, they are ignored as serious bikers. Also, current advocacy programs aren't geared towards youth of color.

Infrastructure Accessibility: Due to uneven advocacy efforts, inequitable access to designated bike lanes in various parts of the city mean certain groups have a greater risk of either getting hit by a car or getting ticketed for riding on a sidewalk.

Communication: Literature shows that some information about biking isn't crossing over cultural gaps such as the cost of equipment, bike share program membership costs, familiarity with bike routes and biking rules.

SUGGESTIONS FOR 2013 BIKE RIDE
- Integrate local Black Businesses
- Campus Specific tour about segregation history
- Involve more participants

Nkemka Uche  Masters Urban Planning
Summer 2013 Activities
A few weeks before the 2013 Juneteenth Freedom Ride event, LifeCykle began offering shop open hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 4:30pm - 8:30pm.

In 2013, the Freedom Ride started from LifeCykle Moyer’s Boys and Girls Club and the event ended with a potluck dinner at the Randolph Street community garden. In 2013, LifeCykle provided bicycles for participants without bikes to fix up by themselves inside the bike shop during open hours in the week of as well as weeks before the Juneteenth Freedom Ride. These bikes became the property of the individual who selected and repaired them. Don Moyers Boys and Girls Club didn’t participate in this year's Freedom Ride due to change in administrative personnel.
Recommendations for 2014

- In addition to LifeCykle open hours during the week of Juneteenth, the Freedom Ride could start earlier with a type of class related to aspects of bicycling and black history that are not Champaign-Urbana specific and may not be discussed during the Freedom Ride.

- LifeCykle should also investigate and become more cognizant of the barriers that prohibit Americans from bicycling and how to overcome those through outreach efforts.

- LifeCykle should rebuild its relationship with the Don Moyer's Boys and Girls club as well as build new relationships with other local parties such as the University of Illinois’ Department of Urban and Regional Planning or one of the department's student organizations.

FURTHER RESEARCH

How are these types of activities advantaged by formal sector help?
Don Moyer Boys and Girls Club for example did not participate in the 2013 Freedom Ride due to a change of administrative personnel, which affected the relationship of the club with key local leaders such as Michael Burns, and Professor Ken Salo.

Feasibility of LifeCykle

- How economically feasible is LifeCykle Co-op?
- Besides Open Hours, what are LifeCykle's schedules for classes, club, and café, and how do these time frames relate with school and after-school timetables.
- How will cyclists, especially youth cyclists, use LifeCykle during winter months?

Present and Future Funding

LifeCykle is currently raising funds through the crowd sourcing website gofundme.com. Their fundraiser page mentions that funds will go to help complete the remainder of their conversion from garage to bike shop, which is about 70% completed. LifeCykle's goal is to raise $15,000. Currently, they have been able to raise $275 from five people in four months. These numbers raise the questions
- How efficient are their crowdsourcing efforts?
- Is LifeCykle eligible for any grants related to community and bicycling especially with plans to incorporate a café as part of their bike shop?

Zoning and tax provisions also have to be adhered to in the operations of the bike shop. This paper deals with the Juneteenth Freedom Ride program currently housed at LifeCykle, therefore questions regarding zoning and tax were not asked during my interview with Rafiki Muktar Kojo.
African American Registry


Neighborhood Youth Design Depot.

Rafiki, M. K. 2013 Interview and Discussions with Nkemka Uche.


Sierra Club. 2013. The New Majority: Pedaling Towards Equity. Infrastructureusa.org


