

Fixin' to Git: One Fan's Love Affair with NASCAR's Winston Cup. By *Jim Wright*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002. 305 pp. Index, notes, figures, photographs, tables. Cloth, \$26.95. ISBN 0-822-32926-3.

Reviewed by Randal L. Hall

Jim Wright is a sociologist (presently at the University of Central Florida) with a long list of publications in such fields as the study of homelessness. He describes "*Fixin' to Git* [as] essentially a retirement fantasy brought to premature fruition by a one-term sabbatical and a near-desperate need to get my head out of the routines of academic research and teaching" (p. 17). A long-time fan of car racing, Wright used a sabbatical from Tulane University in 1999 to spend the summer and fall attending NASCAR (National Association of Stock Car Auto Racing) Winston Cup events at seven tracks. He playfully assures the reader that the resulting book is not "a research monograph on stock-car racing as an emergent element in the popular culture" (p. 18). Unfortunately for readers seeking a fully documented and rigorous analysis of the growth and importance of NASCAR, his denial is an honest one, and this book does not fill the need for an up-to-date academic study of the topic.

Wright has instead produced a book difficult to classify but largely enjoyable to read. It is not only an accessible synthesis of the writings of other scholars on NASCAR but also in part a meditation on his personal history and a chatty narrative of the adventures he shared with his family and friends while sampling the Winston Cup schedule in 1999. It has footnotes, but they are relatively sparse (with a number of references to John Shelton Reed, the esteemed sociologist of all things southern). Given the untroubled use of such charged terms as *redneck* and *white trash* (and Wright's own claim to identify with those categories), the text falls somewhere between an academic study and a popular book that failed to find a trade publisher (p. 19). However, *Fixin' to Git* differs from the many other introductions to NASCAR and tales of experiences on the stock-car circuit, in that Wright's wide reading on the topic leads to a number of original insights about the sport—although they are frustratingly intermingled with too much detail about concession stand-fare and the difficulties of parking at the tracks.

Perhaps the most important contribution of the book is Wright's care in pointing out the extensive inclusion of northern and midwestern promoters, tracks, and drivers in the early history of NASCAR. Along the way, Wright of necessity demolishes the stereotype that Appalachian moonshiners predominated in the sport's early years. More systematically than other writers, he outlines the extent to which the schedule ranged far beyond the South until the close of the 1950s

and makes a tantalizing argument that the 1960s was the time when NASCAR stock-car racing became identified with the South. The limiting of the schedule principally to southern venues in that decade, he argues, had more to do with the evolving business interests of Bill France (the leader among the founders of NASCAR in the late 1940s and head of the organization until 1972) than with cultural traits of the South. This provocative line of analysis deserves more research.

In examining both the cultural and financial elevation of the sport to national importance in recent years, Wright relies a good deal on works such as Mark D. Howell's *From Moonshine to Madison Avenue: A Cultural History of the NASCAR Winston Cup Series* (1997), Robert Hagstrom's *The NASCAR Way: The Business that Drives the Sport* (1998), and existing data from the Southern Focus Poll and other sources. He explains "the instant camaraderie that breaks out wherever race fans congregate" as indicative of a family-like subculture and finds that almost half of adults in United States have some interest in the sport (pp. 147–8). NASCAR has been in tune with American culture in recent years: "Family, community, and spiritual values have also enjoyed a renaissance in the past couple of decades, and while it would be a stretch to claim that NASCAR somehow stimulated the resurgence, it has at least ridden the wave with consummate skill" (p. 36). He touches on the rising cost of racing, the importance of sponsorships, and the resulting competitiveness among well-funded teams. Television has been vital to the process: "NASCAR 'went national' because national corporations discovered they could use the sport to bring national exposure to their products" (p. 223). Wright's summary is a good introduction to the financial side of the sport, but scholars will still want to turn first to Hagstrom's work while awaiting a comprehensive study of the ongoing changes in the racing business.

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