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For Gold and Glory
Charlie Wiggins and the African-American Racing Car Circuit
 By Todd Gould

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002. Pp. xx, 212.
 Illustrations, appendix, notes, index. \$27.95.)

In *For Gold and Glory*, Todd Gould tells the story of race-car driver Charlie Wiggins and the African-American racing car circuit that he invigorated between 1924 and 1936. Although the auto-racing establishment barred African Americans from its events, including the Indianapolis 500, Wiggins's skills as a mechanic and driver were critical in forging the Gold and Glory Sweepstakes—the premiere event of the African-American racing circuit, held in Indianapolis. Wiggins's perseverance and talents reflected the broader values that African Americans used to fight against discrimination and the Ku Klux Klan that was coming to dominate statewide politics even as Wiggins and his fellow black drivers built a successful racing circuit. As black racers crisscrossed the Midwest, they demonstrated that neither the revitalized KKK nor most racing organizations (such as the American Automobile Association) could prevent African Americans from creating a vibrant and influential racing culture.

Gould pulls together a variety of sources and tells his story primarily by quoting at great length (frequently for

entire paragraphs) interviews with professional and amateur historians, the recollections of Wiggins's protégés, or the accounts of newspaper reporters. Although this mode of storytelling works exceptionally well in the world of filmmaking, an area where Gould has won many awards, it does not work quite as well as the primary storytelling device in a written biography.

As Gould asserts the influence of Wiggins's driving and mechanical skills on the racing world, he touches upon important questions about the role of African Americans in the history of sport and automobile culture. Gould suggests that Wiggins's tremendous impact on racing was due to the multi-racial fraternity he created in his garage—"Charlie's Gang," as they were known—which included black and white drivers, mechanics, and automobile aficionados. Indeed, during the 1930s Wiggins mentored five of the top ten Indy 500 drivers. Although Wiggins's impact seems to have been considerable, the outlines and broader significance of his accomplishments remain fuzzy. A number of questions are never fully answered: What were

Wiggins's innovations and precisely how did they change racing culture? Who emulated them and why were they improvements? Also, how was it possible to create such an interracial culture of male camaraderie at a time of deep racial divisions? Was it simply the result of a shared passion for racing?

Gould argues that a brotherhood of racing transcended racial boundaries, noting especially Wiggins's work with Indy 500 winner "Wild Bill" Cummings. Cummings had been part of "Charlie's Gang" and learned much about racing from the black driver. In fact, Wiggins served on Cummings's pit crew the year he won the 500. Yet, because AAA officials would not allow the use of a black mechanic or pit crew, Cummings hired Charlie Wiggins as a janitor. Only after sweeping the floors, and after officials had left the track was Charlie allowed to help craft the winning car. Amazingly, though perhaps not surprisingly, Cummings never publicly acknowledged or thanked Wiggins for his work. Even so, Gould argues that this story showed that "behind those garage doors, there was no color line, no race, and no barriers to overcome."

I would have interpreted this story differently. Cummings and white drivers clearly benefited from the exceptional skills of black drivers, but that they did so without allowing them into their fraternity speaks volumes. Cummings did not "shatter social norms." Rather, on his way to victory, Cummings exploited a phenomenally talented black American, and then did not recognize his labor or talent. This is the story of African Americans writ large. Like other black Americans, Wiggins battled long odds to shape his sport and attempted to carve out a multi-racial and more equitable world, only to be forgotten because of the entrenched racism of society and racing culture. Fortunately, Todd Gould has brought the story of Charlie Wiggins and the African-American racing circuit to light.

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American Grit
A Woman's Letters from the Ohio Frontier
 Edited by Emily Foster

(Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002. Pp. x, 344. Illustrations, notes, appendices, bibliography, index. \$45.00.)

Few published collections of letters capture the heart of an antebellum pioneer family, the essence of their daily

struggles, and the building up of the Midwest more perceptively than *American Grit: A Woman's Letters from the Ohio*