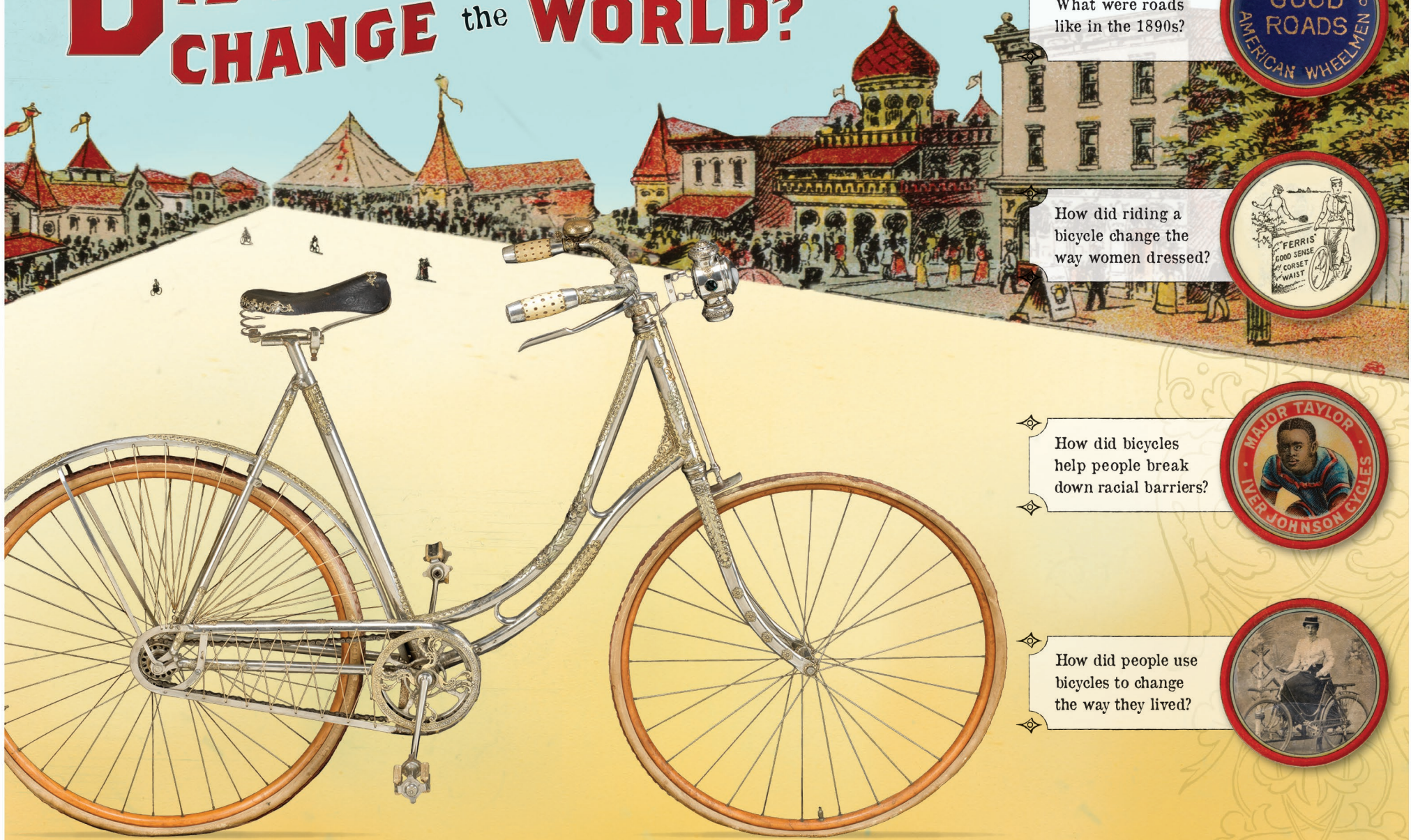


DID BICYCLES CHANGE the WORLD?



What were roads like in the 1890s?



How did riding a bicycle change the way women dressed?



How did bicycles help people break down racial barriers?



How did people use bicycles to change the way they lived?



DID BICYCLES CHANGE the WORLD?



FROM THE 1880S TO THE 1910S, Americans took to the wheel, sparking a nationwide bicycle craze. In the era before automobiles, bicycles were a means of affordable personal mobility.

This unique and unusual Columbia bicycle was customized by Tiffany & Co. in 1896. It was owned by Mrs. M.N. Wiley of Montgomery, Alabama, whose initials on the bicycle are embellished with tiny diamonds and emeralds. The bicycle is an early example of a chain-drive safety bicycle, which was first introduced in the 1880s and lowered the rider's center of gravity. This innovation, along with air-filled tires and coaster brakes introduced in the 1890s, made bicycles more accessible than the high-wheel bicycles introduced in the 1870s. The frame of this bicycle is nickel-plated with gold-plated sterling silver ornamentation, ivory handlebar grips, and a sterling silver lantern with a rock crystal lens. The handgrips are ivory with silver bands, the ends of which have gold embossed designs.

People + Innovative Things + Social Change = Life as We Know It

OBJECT PROJECT IS A HANDS-ON LEARNING SPACE

at the National Museum of American History that celebrates everyday things that changed everything.

Through *Object Project* and related materials, learners consider the impact of innovative things on everyday life in the past. We look at objects for clues about the people who used them and about the social dimensions of the American experience — what makes America... America.

Object Project and this poster model inquiry-based learning, providing learners with access to objects and a host of primary sources from which they can glean information and make inferences. This poster is designed around the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies, and models the C3's inquiry arc.



DIMENSION 1: DEVELOPING QUESTIONS AND PLANNING INQUIRIES

DIMENSION 2: APPLYING DISCIPLINARY TOOLS AND CONCEPTS

DIMENSION 3: EVALUATING SOURCES AND USING EVIDENCE

DIMENSION 4: COMMUNICATING CONCLUSIONS AND TAKING INFORMED ACTION

It begins with a compelling question: “*Did bicycles change the world?*” To use this poster in the classroom, present the compelling question to students, and then have them examine the additional primary sources on the front of the poster. Use the sources to help answer the supporting questions provided, then return to the compelling question. For additional information, use the images of details from the bicycle in the “*Closer Look*” section of the poster to help answer the compelling question.

Next, ask them to share their response to the question. Then, consider together how they might apply this process to the world around them. Have students think of an everyday object they own. Encourage them to think beyond a smartphone, or let them choose from a selection of everyday objects from around your classroom or school. Ask students to research the following:

How have we used this object to change the way we live? How do we use it to change the world around us? What are the stories behind the object that you could uncover?



For more information and additional resources, visit Smithsonian's History Explorer at <http://historyexplorer.si.edu>



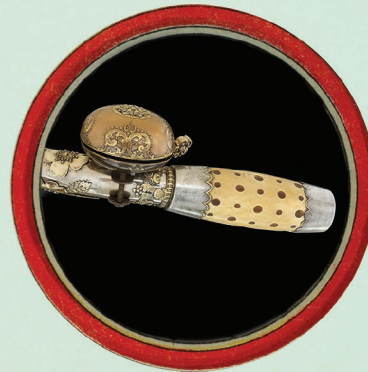
A CLOSER LOOK



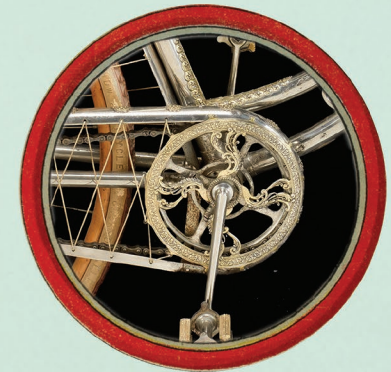
How does this bicycle compare to the one on the cover and to bicycles today?



How would you light the way?



Who might have owned this bicycle, and why?



How does a bicycle work?



GOOD ROADS

As early as the 1880s, cyclists were advocating for good roads, both rural and urban. By the 1890s, groups such as the League of American Wheelmen successfully lobbied state and municipal governments for road improvements.

In the 1890s, bicycle manufacturers began to replace the hard rubber tires attached to the rims of bicycle wheels with removable pneumatic tires filled with air. The tires made for a smoother, easier-to-pedal, faster ride—broadening the bicycle's appeal and increasing the demand for good roads.



FASHION

In the 1890s, the cycling craze gave a boost to the “rational clothing” movement that encouraged women to shed long, cumbersome skirts and bulky underpinnings. Only the most daring American women chose to wear bloomers; most opted for sturdy wool skirts that were just a bit shorter. Even reformers did not suggest that corsets be abandoned entirely, just redesigned to be shorter and more flexible.



RACE

Early bicycle clubs excluded women, African Americans, and recent immigrants. In 1896, Marshall “Major” Taylor sprinted through the color barrier in professional bicycle racing—a wildly popular sport at the time. Taylor's first race was a publicity stunt by his employer, who entered Taylor in an amateur race without his knowledge. Taylor's employer pushed him to the starting line, and the inspiring cheers of the crowd pushed him further, resulting in Taylor's first victory at age thirteen. Over the next twenty years, Taylor became one of the world's most famous bicycle racers. From 1897 to 1900, he was the fastest cyclist in the United States; in 1899, he became the second African American to win a world championship title in sports. At the height of his career, he was one of the highest paid athletes and “Major Taylor” was a household name.



INDEPENDENCE

Bicycles offered women mobility, independence, and a way out. For many the bicycle was, according to one observer in 1896, “a steed upon which they rode into a new world.” Young adults rode their bicycles far from the front-porch oversight of parents and nosy neighbors, challenging—and eventually disrupting—social conventions, including the conventions of dating. And with bicycle lamps, both men and women were free to pedal off to socialize, even after sunset.

Cyclists across the country proudly posed with their wheels. In doing so, they declared their embrace—and mastery—of the new technology while reinforcing their perception of themselves as modern. For many, a bicycle portrait was also a kind of declaration of independence.

