

**St. Louis Derailed: The Role of Consolidation, Electrification and Expansion in the
St. Louis Transit Strike of 1900**

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Introduction

In a continual state of contestation, the ever volatile relationship between capital and labor occasionally yields explosive moments of active resistance and violence. The St. Louis Transit Strike of 1900 and general strike of 1911 in Montevideo, Uruguay demonstrate instances of paralleled exceptionality. For over a century, historians have attempted to derive the causes behind working class revolts against capital and “progress.” Traditional economic explanations, however, are insufficient in assessing the causes of the dramatic strikes and violence that enveloped two major North American cities following the turn of the nineteenth century. Because “the consciousness of a worker is not a curve that rises and falls with wages and prices...[but rather] the accumulation of a lifetime of experience and socialization, inherited traditions, struggles successful and defeated...” it becomes apparent that additional unstudied cultural factors pushed these transit workers to risk their lives and livelihoods in the spring of 1900.¹ Scholars examining the St. Louis Transit strike through the years have exclusively investigated the past in attempting to explain the story of working class conviction. While also utilizing events prior to the great strike, this essay sets the events within a more encompassing and cultural framework inclusive of the upcoming Louisiana Purchase Exposition of 1904 ripe in the minds of workers, journalists and politicians.

Examination of complex cultural, psychological and economic changes of the period leading up to and following the St. Louis Transit Strike of 1900 proves critical to fully understanding worker consciousness. Probing to discover the catalyst behind the raging violence and strike of 1900, this essay will examine cultural changes occurring in St. Louis around the time of the strike. Cultural engagement sheds new light on the

¹ Quote attributed to E.P. Thompson, but never found in any of his publications.

causes of the St. Louis Transit Strike of 1900. This essay yields provocative insight into the conflicting definitions of “progress” in the early twentieth century by juxtaposing the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair and Anton Rosenthal’s Montevideo streetcar story with the St. Louis Transit Strike of 1900. Despite cultural and linguistic differences, Montevidean transit employees shared common experiences with “progress”. St. Louis at the turn of the century was a volatile city on the brink of explosion. Workers’ consciousnesses remained heightened from the “weighty baggage” carried following the great streetcar strike of 1887 that yielded no improvement to working conditions.² Ethnic and social divisions grew more volatile as St. Louis failed to host a citywide centennial celebration. The 1899 merger of St. Louis transportation system in conjunction with previously unconsidered cultural changes including electrification and railway expansion of the late nineteenth century established an environment conducive in igniting the St. Louis Transit strike of 1900.

Story of the St. Louis Strike

On June 10, 1900, the intersection of Washington Avenue and Broadway erupted in riot as local St. Louis Transit strikers returned from a union support rally in East St. Louis. Strikers were gunned down by members the sheriff’s posse. Composed of the city’s elite “better elements,” the posse *commitatus* was organized to protect the transit company’s capital investments.³ This band of upper class citizens included merchants, pastors and lawyers, many of which had never held guns before.⁴ Murdering three and leaving fourteen workers injured, June 10 marked the bloodiest single day of the multi-

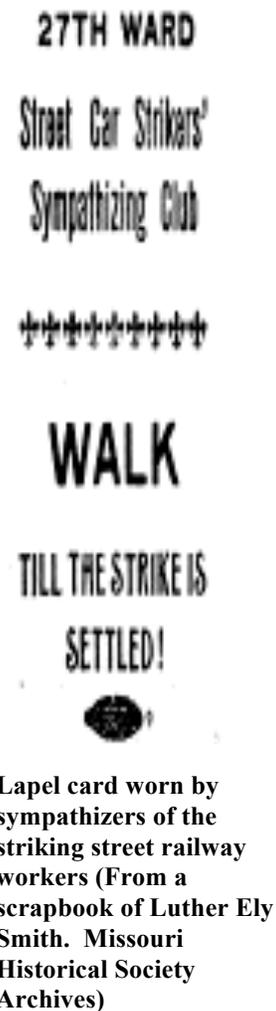
² Ibid.

³ Reedy, William. 15-16.

⁴ *The New York Times*. 2 June 1900.

month streetcar dispute. Blame for the intensification of the strike immediately fell upon the strikers and posse members. Principal blame, however, as outspoken St. Louis publisher William Marion Reedy argued, should ultimately have rested on the local politicians whose political self-interests allowed the situation to decline into anarchy and civil war. Calling Mayor Ziegenheim “an unspeakable dodger, demagogue and clown,” Reedy found the local Democratic officials responsible “for the state of civil war which exists in this community.”⁵ Reedy argued that the bloodshed and violence culminating on June 10 with the “Washington Avenue Massacre” was the result of bad government and politicians like Mayer Ziegenheim, Police Board President Harry Hawes and Governor Stephens that “place[d] party and personal profit above public welfare.”⁶

Seeking reelection in an upcoming local primary, Democratic Mayor Ziegenheim and Missouri Governor Stevens sought to please their contingents and not alienate any of their political support by engaging in any anti-labor actions. Rather than ordering the city police to squelch the strike and rioting violence, the mayor and Police Board assigned Republican Sheriff Pohlman the task of recruiting a posse to protect corporate interest and the general public from violence. Issued May 30, the order for 1,000 men was amended a day later as the city requested an additional 1,500 “Special Deputies” to



⁵ Reedy, 13

⁶ Reedy, 22.

maintain order.⁷ Recruits were given the order by posse commander Colonel Cavender to “make sure that the criminals reach the jail or the morgue.”⁸ Although conscripted for their “responsibility” and “cool-headedness,” these ill-trained city elites grew ever hasty with the rising summer heat.

Demands of the transit employees were first made public March 10, 1900. Requests included a work reduction to ten hour days with a standard hourly wage rate for all trainmen of 25 cents. Embedded in this request was the developing “belief that technological improvements, including the electrical engine, were the chief cause of unemployment and that a reduction in the length of the working week was almost the only way to offset these technological displacements.”⁹ Foremost on the list was the unprejudiced reinstatement of all employees discharged for their union affiliation. Further enumerated in the proclamation issued to management and published in local papers were the demands that men doing extra work receive pay from the time they reported to the time the car returned. The list continued to request that extra men not be placed at the bottom of the work list upon an absence and that peripheral employees such as firemen and greasers receive wages for all overtime. What proved to be the largest point of contention, however, came in proposing that the company recognize and work with the newly formed union, the Street Railway Employees Local 131, in a closed shop setting, a request not granted until 1918 amid World War I and the national flu epidemic.

The newly consolidated Transit Company consistently averted the issue of layoffs by addressing compensation complaints. Responding to the strikers’ demands on March 9, 1900, Edwards Whitaker, President of the St. Louis Transit Company defended the

⁷ *The New York Times*. 1 June 1900.

⁸ *The New York Times*. 5 June 1900.

⁹ Roediger, David R. *Our Own Time: A History of American Labor and the Working Day*. 247.

transit company on the grounds that “since taking charge of the lines in the transit system the company has not reduced wages...[nor]...increased the hours of service.”¹⁰

Whitaker, however, avoided addressing discriminatory layoffs and the changing nature of streetcar work. The St. Louis Transit Company initially compromised with Local 131 but soon reneged on the agreement violating the ten-hour work agreement as well the promise of reinstating all men discharged on union grounds. Failure to comply with the initial agreement led to a summer long strike declared the night of May 7, 1900. Corporate management proceeded to dig in against union pressure as George W. Baumhoff, the Transit Company’s superintendent, swore that management would “die with their boots on” rather than give in to union demands.¹¹ The transit authorities, however, were not the only stubborn parties. Union President W.D Mahon refused arbitration of the dispute even as a plea to national American Federation of Labor leaders for financial aid went out less than three weeks into the work stoppage.¹²

The strikers’ initial mass popularity prevented local political officials from actively suppressing the work stoppage. The 3,325 striking transit workers gained popular civic support due to the St. Louisians’ disappointment with infrequent and crowded car service following the 1899 city-wide merger. Taxpayers objected to the government’s hypocritical doublespeak as politicians spoke out publicly against trusts and later approved the transit merger amidst under the table bribes and promises. Corporate refusal to accept arbitration and the importation of replacements from Cleveland and other Eastern cities only turned the public further against the transit

¹⁰ “Reply of the St. Louis Transit Co. to Mayer Ziegenheim” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. 9 March 1900.

¹¹ Hood, Clifton D. “The Workers’ Struggle for Organization: The St. Louis Street Railway Strike of 1900” (Unpublished Senior Honors Thesis, Washington University, 1976) 18-19.

¹² *The New York Times*. 27 May 1900.

company.¹³ Encouragement and support came from all sectors of the city as an affluent ward in the city's Western end formed a sympathizers' club that worked to repeal the franchise tax exempt transit company. Following announcement of the strike, streets filled with people expressing sympathy for the strikers by bearing placards on their hats and coat lapels which read: "I will walk until the street car companies settle."¹⁴

Support from local unions also swelled. Union support came from all sectors of local industry and even traversed the gender divide as several women from the Garment Makers' Union rushed a moving tram the first day of the strike. Forcing the car to a halt, one young female strike supporter broke from the crowd waving her union card and confronted the scabbing conductor, who was her brother, reprimanding him, "don't do what you are doing!"¹⁵ The Bricklayers Union organized a mid-summer baseball contest with benefits going to the strikers.¹⁶ Several local unions including The Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, Brotherhood of Painters and Decorators and the Journeymen Barbers issued five dollar fines to union members found riding in a St. Louis Transit car while other local businesses refused to sell goods to scabs and offered donations to the strikers.¹⁷ The streetcar workers gained additional support from the Socialist controlled Central Trades and Labor Union (CTLU), the main branch of the American Federation of Labor in St. Louis. Evidence of strong class cohesion and popular support so threatened the St. Louis elite that they believed open class warfare had erupted.¹⁸

¹³ Piott, Steven L. "Modernization and the Anti-Monopoly Issue; The St. Louis Transit Strike of 1900" *Missouri Historical Society*, 1978. 3

¹⁴ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. 9 May 1900.

¹⁵ *St. Louis Star*, 8 May 1900.

¹⁶ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. 9 June 1900.

¹⁷ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. 4 May 1900.

¹⁸ Young, Dina. 6.

Less than a week after commencement of the strike, rumors surfaced of the Federal government stepping in to settle the strike. United States District Attorney Rossier found grounds for intervention due to disruption of mail delivery. Although Federal troops never intervened, the United States Circuit Court did issue an injunction commanding that strikers refrain from interfering with mail cars. The writ, however, said nothing of interference with the

running of passenger cars as violent anarchy reigned in the streets of St. Louis.¹⁹ Workers protested the definition of progress, importation of strikebreakers, and corporate amalgamation. Refusing to negotiate, mobs and “seething mass[es] of tumultuous humanity, bent on making



Photo of the five-ton boulder rolled onto streetcar tracks on Grand Avenue near Broadway during the first week of the strike. The boulder measured 54 x 48 x 42 inches. Photograph by Harry E. Stege. Missouri Historical Society Photograph and Print Collection.

trouble” gathered in the streets to demand a more equitable relationship with corporate management through union recognition.²⁰ During the St. Louis strike, crowds gathered around the few trolleys which continued to run launching insults and stones at motormen. Extreme acts of vandalism became common occurrences as strikers and their sympathizers struggled to interrupt the movement of trolleys about the cities. The first day of the stoppage saw a five-ton boulder rolled upon the tracks. Disruptions continued

¹⁹ *The New York Times*. 20 May 1900.

²⁰ *St. Louis Star*. 8 May 1900.

as strikers threw dead frogs, tar, rocks and wet bread at “scabs,” cut cables and wires, dynamited tracks and during one strike rally started a huge bonfire atop the car rails. Conditions deteriorated to the point that the company began to offer \$100 rewards for the arrest and conviction of persons placing obstructions on the tracks and \$250 for persons who “intimidate, throw missiles, or cut the feed wires of the St. Louis Transit Company.”²¹

Riots became commonplace as mobs gathered in attempts to harass, threaten and pull motormen and passengers out of cars. *The New York Times* reported that since the strike’s beginning “hardly a day has passed...without somebody being wounded by bullets or injured by flying missiles and police clubs.”²² Women were no exception. Multiple newspaper accounts document cases of militant crowds attacking affluent-looking women riding streetcars into South St. Louis. Replacement workers and city police riding the cars frequently responded with gunfire against the strikers. These brutal contests resulted in numerous gruesome injuries and deaths to both strikers and innocent bystanders. The atrocious magnitude of the strike was immediately noted as William Reedy in June of 1900 compared the strike to the New York draft riots and reflected that “more men have been killed and wounded during the strike than in most of the lesser battles in the Philippines.”²³ In attempting to disrupt the capitalistic machine, frequent acts of physical and psychological violence were directed at replacement workers and transit patrons. Intimidation of substitute employees along with expectations to keep company schedules despite the reduced number of trams placed workers under extreme psychological duress. This immense pressure forced John Powers, a replacement worker

²¹ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. 13 May 1900.

²² *The New York Times*. 28 May 1900.

²³ Reedy, William. 2.

from Philadelphia, into a state of insanity as he cried for protection against those he believed to be pursuing him.²⁴ Amidst this period of heightened class cohesion and consciousness, it is important to investigate why members of the Local 131 were unable to recognize the similar plight shared by replacement motormen and further disrupt the capitalistic structure by organizing imported “scabs.”

Considering the violent conflict between non-union motormen and strikers it appears that the transit union made little attempt to organize those imported from Eastern cities. Amidst a working class battle against capital and “progress,” it seems that co-opting the imported workers into the union would only strengthen the union’s bargaining power. Attempts at bringing scabs into the fold ultimately failed as little more than fifty of the men imported joined the strikers.²⁵ The reason for failure in organizing these men, however, was due neither to negligence nor racist resentment. W.D. Mahon, President of the St. Louis Transit Company Union, on May 27th visited employees of the Brooklyn Rapid Transit system and the New York Metropolitan system urging them to refuse scabbing and strike on behalf of their working class brethren. Mahon’s “agitating” was to no avail as less than one-sixth of the New York men employed on the trolley cars were organized. More importantly, many of the men moving West to gain employment in St. Louis refused to join the Local 131 as a result of the “soreness of the great [strike] defeat which they sustained last year.”²⁶ The New York strike’s failure remained an influential piece of these broken transplants’ collective memory. Ironically, many of the workers that sought employment in St. Louis as “scabs” were the staunchest union men a year

²⁴ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. 8 May 1900.

²⁵ *The New York Times*. 28 May 1900.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

earlier, were among the last to return to work, and thereby failed to be reinstated upon settlement.²⁷

Despite public outrage, the transit company consistently refused to give in to union demands. Local union leaders also refused arbitration. The persistent violence and inability to reach a compromise brought American Federation of Labor President Samuel Gompers to Saint Louis in hopes of settling the stagnating dispute. Gompers, however, also failed to negotiate a settlement and on June 17th organized a general boycott against the Transit Company aimed at making the operation of the streetcar corporation economically impossible. In addition to the boycott, a union run transportation company, funded by union dues, put twenty busses into metropolitan service. The boycott placed a large enough financial strain on the company to yield a resolution to the strike on July 2nd. The stoppage, however, was short-lived as it resumed July 9 as the terms of the contract were breached. Striker resistance following the renewal of the strike significantly weakened. Public support and donations to the strike fund began to deteriorate making it fiscally impossible for the union to offer a subsistence living to union members. With low levels of funding, the union bus company became unable to compete against the larger and more efficient St. Louis Transit Company. As a result of the weakening resistance, Sheriff Pohlman began to reduce the size of his posse. Even as the end grew near, union leaders refused to negotiate a settlement. By mid-September the boycott was lifted. No formal statement marking an end to the strike was ever issued.²⁸

While the transit strike of 1900 failed to directly improve working conditions or facilitate employee sovereignty within the workplace, the strike brought monopoly and

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Young, Dina. 16.

labor issues to the attention of state politicians. The strike also brought into focus concerns over municipal services, corporate amalgamation, franchise taxation and public ownership of urban transportation systems. Legislative changes were also prompted as a result of the St. Louis work stoppage with a “franchise tax law” gaining passage in 1901 and several social Democrats including Joseph W. Folk and Lee Meriwether securing election to government posts.

Montevideo

Anton Rosenthal’s analysis of twentieth century Montevideo and the conflict over the streetcar and progress provides valuable comparative insight to examine the St. Louis transit strike of 1900. Evaluating the Montevideo experience in conjunction with St. Louis provides a more complete understanding of the impact electrification of the streetcar had in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Rather than analyzing a single city and its people’s reaction towards technological change and “progress,” a comparative examination of electrification and expansion of railways allows one to place both potential anomalies into a larger joint context. Comparative analysis of snapshots from each locale demonstrates how the streetcar became “a tool used by the elite to attempt to reorder public space and to modify the behavior of the city’s ‘popular classes.’” More than simply “an efficient conveyance,” the electric streetcar became “a machine which encapsulated antagonistic ideologies within its daily operation and which became an arena where class conflict was continually waged”.²⁹ Through daily contestation, the streetcar became a volatile symbol of progress.

²⁹ Rosenthal, Anton. 321.

Contestation over the definition of “progress” in Montevideo began with the introduction of the electric streetcar in 1906. City officials and editorials trumpeted the implementation of the “improved” means of transportation, describing the splendor and amazement surrounding its arrival as “something like the coming of the Messiah, the passage of a monster, the revelation of a phenomenon.”³⁰ Although the electrical streetcar was extolled during the week of its inauguration, this enthusiasm was short-lived and rapidly crumbled amidst negative employee rhetoric.

Electrification and new foreign ownership of Montevideo’s rail system taking effect in 1907 led to a litany of streetcar accidents as well as a dramatic deterioration in working conditions that made labor more mechanistic and regimented. Motormen soon after corporate reorganization were forced to wear “elaborate, heavy, standard-issue uniforms in all seasons.”³¹ Although miserable in Montevideo’s summers, implementation of the new uniform policy was more symbolic of the new regimen in which motor men were to observe. The mechanization and depersonalization of the workplace is evident in photo captions of Uruguayan railcar workers from the early twentieth century that fail to mention employees’ names. As Rosenthal asserts, “these workers were meant to be efficient, silent and invisible.”³² The trolley employees commented of the detestable conditions in scathing newspaper attacks against British and German capital. Workers within this new environment felt that, “A worker without a stomach, genitals or brain, who does not eat, nor think, nor feel the sweet affections of love; an automatic worker, artificial made of ‘steel’ who works without rest

³⁰ *La Tribuna Popular*, 9 December 1906, p.6.

³¹ Rosenthal, Anton. 476.

³² Rosenthal, Anton. 333.

mechanically...would be the preferred worker, dreamt by the vampires in their desire for profits.”³³

Montevideo street rail expansion and electrification dramatically altered the urban building progress and proved essential to “uniting areas previously separated from central zones.”³⁴ The increased speed of the *electrico* caused a shrinking of perceived geographic distances in Montevideo. Expanded access to more areas of the city contributed to a greater mixing of people in all social classes and a “certain democratization of leisure.”³⁵ Increased speeds of travel and the spread of new service schedules, however, accidents resulted in more frequent accidents and a “tyranny of the clock which made trolley crews virtual prisoners on their cars, unable to leave even to eat or relieve themselves during a long shift which could last from 5 to 8 hours.”³⁶ According to one striker, it was routine for crewmen to work 13½ hours without taking a single station break.³⁷ “Progress,” through electrification and expansion of transit lines, significantly worsened the lives of many Montevideans.

As a result of foreign ownership and electrification working conditions significantly worsened. Transit employees responded quickly. Contestation first surfaced as early as June 1907 when 40 conductors and drivers were fired as they reacted negatively to new uniform regulations, wage scales and an authority structure that left workers feeling “as if they were soldiers.”³⁸ Workers responded to the layoffs by attempting to organize against capital but failed as those heading the rally met immediate

³³ *El Travania*, I:7, July 29, 1911, 2.

³⁴ Rosenthal, Anton. 474.

³⁵ Rosenthal, Anton. 475.

³⁶ Rosenthal, Anton, 477.

³⁷ Rosenthal, Anton. 477.

³⁸ *La Tribuna Popular*, 23 June 1907, p.4.

replacement. In 1910, the streetcar employees published their first newspaper, *El Combate*, to voice dissent over working conditions and their “lost rights.” Tensions between capital and labor mounted over the definition of progress only to be seen in local, passive outbursts until 1911 when a group of aggravated trolley workers incited a general city walkout strike and successfully attracted the support of tens of thousands. Demanding amended work rules, pay increases, cash deposit for uniforms, a 8 ½ hour workday and the reinstatement of workers fired as a result of union activity, the strikers attacked capital’s definition of progress and corporate managers as “poisonous reptiles of capitalism” and “declared enemies of the working class”.³⁹ Rather than avoiding the rhetoric of progress, workers labored to redefine the term swearing “a war to the death against everything which represents progress.”⁴⁰

As in St. Louis, strikers were effective in securing public sympathy and support. News boys spread news of the strike and became sympathizers as they attempted to halt the movement of streetcars by “molest[ing] men and passengers by stone-throwing, abusive language and so forth.”⁴¹ Class solidarity emerged as bricklayers tossed bricks from construction sites at passing trolleys and students insulted passengers and attempted to persuade replacement workers to abandon their work.⁴² Many of Montevideo’s citizens chose to walk long distances to work and on May 15, 1911 were so effective in their boycott that the press commented on how “the banging of the gong, the shaking of the trolley, sounds so familiar to our ears, were not heard all day.”⁴³

³⁹ Rosenthal, Anton. 337-338.

⁴⁰ Rosenthal, Anton. 338.

⁴¹ *The Montevideo Times*, May 14, 1911, 1.

⁴² Rosenthal, Anton, 485

⁴³ *El Dia*, May 15, 1911, “La Gran Huelga”

The transit employees' revolt in both Montevideo and St. Louis was the result of several cultural and environmental changes. The political, social and cultural climates in Montevideo and St. Louis following the turn of the century were ripe for revolution. What political, economic and cultural changes leading up to and soon following the turn of the nineteenth century prompted the working class activism, organization and consciousness evident in Montevideo and St. Louis?

Consolidation

Because electricity is easily channeled via wire from power stations to other urban locales, electric streetcar companies operate under the principle of economies of scale.⁴⁴ As a result of this principle, it made little sense for multiple electrical streetcar companies to compete within the same city. Therefore, throughout the nation, electric transport companies frequently merged into single firms, forming natural monopolies, in order to save on unnecessary overhead. St. Louis and Montevideo were not exceptions, as small privately owned transportation companies consolidated themselves into single impersonal corporations micromanaged from afar.

Corruption and dirty politics plagued the 1899 consolidation of St. Louis' urban rail services. Covert fund exchanges and acts of political self-interest, however, did not go unnoted as the public readily criticized the bribery and political corruption behind consolidation which became final on September 30, 1899. Denouncing trusts and then signing the "Street Railway Bill", St. Louis bureaucrats took flak as the city-wide merger resulted in horrific public transportation service. Left "no voice in the making of the law

⁴⁴ George W. Hilton, *Transport Technology and the Urban Pattern*. *Journal of Contemporary History*, July 1969. 126.

which created the trust,” taxpayers were the ultimate losers in the battle labor waged against capital and technological change.⁴⁵ Following the mass merger, transit customers grew outraged as they dealt with reduced numbers of streetcars and increased distances between stops.⁴⁶ All the while, passenger patronage spiked. In 1901, St. Louis publisher, Charles Delbridge produced a scathing criticism the newly formed transit “franchise” in the form of an illustrated pamphlet entitled *Move Forward, Please*. Within the text, Delbridge attacked the reckless driving, excessive speeds, and the “persistent, continuous and brutal refusal...to put on enough cars to enable those who are forced to pay for seats to get them.”⁴⁷ Due to the transit company’s monopoly stronghold, St. Louisians maintained little power in which to air their grievances and no choice in taking their business elsewhere. St. Louisians viewed the corporate amalgamation as a “quasi-public concern,” an establishment in which “the public at large have an interest.” The public believed the St. Louis Transit Company should be operated for public benefit and owed a “duty not only to those who are entitled to dividends on its stock, but to the people of the city and State as well.”⁴⁸

Public statements and editorials reflect the broad anti-monopoly sentiments alive at the turn of the century. A May 17 statement made on behalf of the Central Trades and Labor Union, Building Trades Council, and the Street Railway Employees’ Union further defended St. Louisians’ right to protection against foreign funded monopolies, most of whose stockholders lived in New York, Boston, London and Paris.⁴⁹ Similar complaints

⁴⁵ Reedy, William.. 4.

⁴⁶ Holmes, Harry D. “Socio-Economic Patterns of Non-Partisan Political Behavior in the Industrial Metropolis: St. Louis, 1895-1916” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Missouri, 1973), 31-52.

⁴⁷ Delbridge, Charles L. *Move Forward, Please*. Pg 11.

⁴⁸ *St. Louis Star*, May, 18, 1900.

⁴⁹ *St. Louis Star*, May, 20, 1900

surfaced surrounding the posse comitatus' protection of the Transit Company's property rather than the rights local citizens had to competitive markets and a reliable and accessible transportation system. An editorial posted in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* echoed this sentiment as it protested, "[a] taxpayer is entitled to rights, but I do not think it is right to force old men to protect a company whose stock is valued at \$90,000,000, for which they pay less than \$40,000,000, and pay a very small tax."⁵⁰ Consolidation, though inflammatory, was only one catalyst behind the strike. Monopolization, however, contributed significantly to the transit strike of 1900 as it was the most vocalized complaint from both strikers and their sympathizers.

While formation of the monopoly certainly impacted the actual physical day-to-day lives of the transit worker, it is equally important to consider the responsibility consolidation had in shaping the workers' psyche and sense of identity. As a result of consolidation, former loyal employees of small independent transit lines became disgruntled "servants of one gigantic combination of capitalists."⁵¹ The 1899 transportation merger played a critical role in spurring the strike as it led laborers to ponder, "If capitalists could combine, why not labor?" Transit employees began to organize as they reflected, "If the capitalists could tie up the whole city in inescapable coils of rail and prevent the construction of competing lines, why could not the employees combine to protect their own interests and, if necessary, tie up the capitalists?"⁵² Job security following monopolization became threatened. Although St. Louis Transit Company President Edwards Whitaker promised that every one of his employees was secure in his new position "so long as he is faithful and efficient in the

⁵⁰ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 2, 1900

⁵¹ Reedy, William. 5.

⁵² Reedy, William. 7

discharge of his duties,” this was less than the case. Left intentionally ambiguous, Whitaker’s statement left what merited “faithful” and “efficient” service to his company agents’ personal discretion.

Expansion

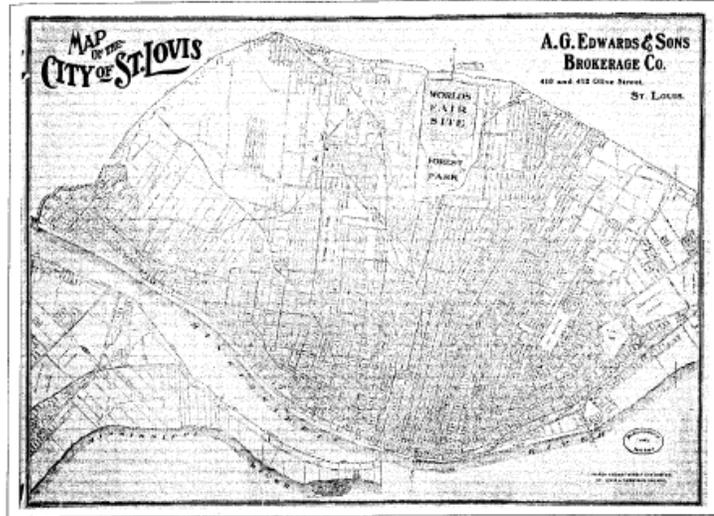
Streetcar expansion in Montevideo and St. Louis “redefined the social space of the city by reducing perceived distances between...parks, neighborhoods and commercial districts, and symbolically demonstrated that the new urban order was in the hands of a political hierarchy.”⁵³ Through expansion and electrification of streetcars, the streetcar evolved into a cultural and economic symbol as citizen laborers became increasingly skeptical of modernity, corporate mergers, and the definition of “progress” dispensed from the mouths of capital. Rail expansion, route reorganization and the increased speed of electric railcars allowed for the disintegration of traditional spatial boundaries in the city. Electric powered cars dramatically altered urban settlement, as locations previously unreachable became feasible distances. Electric trolleys allowed employees to live farther from city centers as the manageable distance to travel to work doubled from the 2.5 or 3 mile distance practical with horses.⁵⁴ These transportation changes created an increased sense of class consciousness as traditional borders between neighborhoods crumbled.

⁵³ Rosenthal, Anton 319.

⁵⁴ Hilton, George W. “Transport Technology and the Urban Pattern”. *Journal of Contemporary History*. July 1969. 126.

Street railroad expansion became a common element of the St. Louis landscape near the turn of the nineteenth century.

Beginning in the late 1890s as part of the fairground extension, the Suburban line completely



City Map of St. Louis, 1901, issued by A.G. Edwards and Company.

blocked Sarah Street off to all traffic from West Belle to Easton Avenue. The complete route, once opened, ran north on Sarah to St. Louis Avenue, east on St. Louis to Warne and north along Warne to Natural Bridge Road. Completed by October 1899, work was then to switch to Union Avenue and a three mile extension north to allow the Suburban line access to Bellefontaine and Calvary cemeteries. Major work on this expansion project, however, failed to take place until the spring of 1900.⁵⁵ In addition to turn of the century expansion, streetcar management following consolidation reorganized routes. As a result, several routes including Bellefontaine and California Avenue lines merged into a 30 mile belt.⁵⁶ A similar loop completed at the crossing of Broadway and Olive Streets further extended citizen's exposure to the city.⁵⁷ Route changes and expansion dramatically altered portions of the city accessible when traveling the private rail system.

Expansion and reorganization of street routes allowed motormen and passengers to explore areas of the city previously unseen. Track electrification in Montevideo gave riders the ability to, "journey long distances in a short time and to acquire knowledge of a

⁵⁵ Young, Andrew. *The St. Louis Streetcar Story*, 78.

⁵⁶ "Motormen Are Lost" *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. 10 June 1901

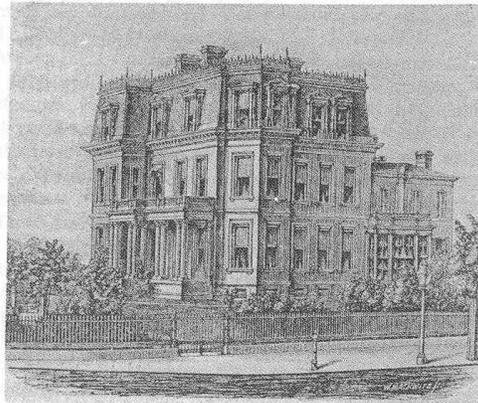
⁵⁷ "Changes on the Olive St". *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. June 11, 1901.

range of neighborhoods.”⁵⁸ Exposure to these “new” areas of the city played a large role in heightening class consciousness and contributed to an already volatile social atmosphere that erupted in the summer of 1900. Pleasure-seeking passengers from both ends of St. Louis had “queer experiences” aboard trams as they took advantage of new routes to “visit parts of town they had never seen before.” Traveling these new routes resulted in extreme confusion and chaos as untrained motormen “took wrong switches and after running a block or so on the wrong streets were backed up to take a fresh start.” Lost in unfamiliar locales, motormen stopped pedestrians on the street and inquired of passengers as to the location of transfer points. The *Post-Dispatch* compared paying a fare to buying a lottery ticket, “If you won a prize you got back home. If you didn’t you asked a policeman.”⁵⁹ Confusion resulted in the consistent loss of streetcars as employees complained that, “they might as well have been told to find the south pole.”

The newness of these streets and areas is evident in the “Song of the Motorman:”

“I’ve cruised all around
 The Water Tower
 And I know where Herbert is
 And Bremen and Angelica
 Are right in my line of bix

But I’m tangled up
 When I get down south
 On Miami, Dover or Primm
 From Keokuk
 My chances are mighty slim”⁶⁰



**Home of Charles H. Peck, Vandeventer Place,
 1878. *Missouri Historical Society***

⁵⁸ Rosenthal, Anton. 329.

⁵⁹ “Motormen Are Lost” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. 10 June 1901

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

Exposure to affluent areas of St. Louis previously inaccessible allowed lower and middle class transit employees and passengers to visually conceptualize their class differences. As rail lines expanded and reorganized so as to pass through St. Louis' West End and other unseen pockets of wealth, working class identity and consciousness surged. Expansion and electrification allowed working class citizens exposure to scenes of conspicuous consumption. These experiences aided the common laborer in better identifying himself within an unrestrained capitalistic world. Filled with exquisite residences, the West End touted its refinement and affluence. The extreme wealth of the residents of the district was easily discerned. Elegant homes of extravagant beauty lined the streets, each "surrounded by stretching green lawns, fresh and sparkling." Detailed in the *National Magazine*, the West End residences were described as "veritable palaces in every particular of richness, appointment, and setting – even in size". Until streetcar expansion and electrification in the 1890s, however, these "island" neighborhoods of luxury remained largely isolated from the *hoi polloi*.⁶¹

Electric streetcars rapidly redefined social space of the city, destroying the intimacy, cleanliness and exclusivity of many regions occupied by wealthy elites. Physical distance due to the increased speed of electric transport no longer provided for the protection from "intrusion" of commoners. Urban changes were rapid and expansive. Grand Avenue with the growth of electrical transit was converted from a residential street into a commercial thoroughfare. Vandeventer Place, a three-quarter mile street, extending from Grand to Vandeventer Avenue was home to numerous capitalist moguls during the late nineteenth century. Laid out in 1870, Vandeventer was the premier address in St. Louis by the late 1880s. Vandeventer Place, however, by 1890 experienced

⁶¹ Primm, James Neal. *Lion of the Valley* 367. Primm cites the 1903 *National Magazine*.

significant change as it became subjected to noise, smoke, and deterioration of its streets. Residents of the area attempted to maintain their exclusivity and distinction through regulation. Vandeventer trustees deterred unwelcome visitors and undesired development by prohibiting multi-family residences, hiring neighborhood watchmen and enforcing property maintenance standards. Isaac Lionberger, Vandeventer resident up until the invasion of the streetcar, critiqued the nature of progress much like the transit workers, lamenting that “progress has been accompanied by horrid waste.” Burdened by the “roar of street cars,” Vandeventer residents complained that streetcars and the invasion of the masses transformed otherwise “pleasant neighborhoods” into regions “besmirched by smoke and dust and dirt.” Many elites like Lionberger relocated into new areas of settlements further removed from the “intrusions of the vulgar.”⁶²

St. Louis officials at the time seem to have failed to recognize rail expansion as a catalyst for the transit strike of 1900. City administrators and progressives of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were blind to the role expansion and increased exposure to areas of the city played in building class consciousness. Instead, many St. Louis city officials believed expansion and increased access to areas of the city to be an effective means of unifying and pacifying the masses. While city professionals and officials involved with the City Beautiful reform movement acknowledged class and ethnic tensions alive in St. Louis, these officials believed increased city access would help create a tranquil urban environment that would be “reflect[ed] in the souls of the city’s inhabitants, inducing order, calm and propriety.”⁶³ Moreover, without any

⁶² Primm, James Neal. *Lion of the Valley*. 365.

⁶³ Wilson, William H., *The City Beautiful Movement* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 92.

citywide holiday centennial celebration, St. Louis missed an ideal opportunity to encourage class and ethnic unity.⁶⁴

Seeking to remedy the substantive class and ethnic divide present at the turn of the century, politicians and reformers acted out of the belief that if people could “comfortably and pleasantly reach the parks of sections other than their own, they would quickly find that the city is one city, not as so unfortunately appears, three or more distinctly separate communities.” City planners sought to unite the community through infrastructural expansion into “one fine and powerful city” and targeted the elimination of “physical barriers which seemed to have created feelings of separation into several inharmonious sections.” Turn of the century St. Louis also experienced expansive street growth in conjunction with the transit company’s construction of street rails. Competing theories clashed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries regarding the social impact street and rail expansion would produce. In 1892, the St. Louis Street Commissioner M.J. Murphy sought to improve access to the city parks proposing that St. Louis’s boulevards be expanded to connect the parks for Murphy believed “urban parks were places where all the city’s inhabitants, upper and lower classes, congregated to obtain both the healthful effects of rural life and the democratic mingling of the classes.”⁶⁵ In reality, however, street and railcar expansion had an unexpected impact. The blurring of socio-economic borders and democratization of urban space occurring as a result of electrification and expansion produced a heightened sense of class consciousness and economic resentment.

⁶⁴ Young, Dina. 5.

⁶⁵ Rafferty, Edward C. *Orderly City, Orderly Lives; The City Beautiful Movement in St. Louis.* p 41.

While St. Louis reformers believed road and rail expansion would eradicate city division and segmentation, Montevideo railroad management speculated conversely, vouching that the expanded trolley service would "make possible the segmentation of the city by divorcing residential from commercial zones making land in the central city too expensive for use as private housing."⁶⁶ Montevideo saw the streetcar as a means to "facilitate the building of new houses and neighborhoods on the outskirts of the city for the working class," allowing inner city clearing to make room for more development.⁶⁷ As hypothesized, track expansion in Montevideo did in fact "contribute to the division of Montevideo into distinct commercial and residential zones, and to the development of wealthy suburbs through land speculation."⁶⁸ Infrastructural expansion played a significant role in reshaping the physical urban environment as well as the psyche of the working class in the 1890s and 1900s. While roads and rails brought people together physically, it often drove them apart psychologically.

Electricity

Electricity in its incipient years was a source of great mystery, amazement and fear. Although misunderstood in its initial years, electricity came to be deemed the "power of to-day" by 1904 at the St. Louis World's Fair.⁶⁹ The public's perceived fear and misunderstanding led to the affixation of negative sentiments to electricity. Electrical fires exhibited as in the case of the Frank Brothers' dry goods fire in St. Louis on October 22, 1890 mesmerized onlookers and frustrated fire departments rendering them

⁶⁶ Rosenthal, Anton. 328

⁶⁷ Rosenthal, Anton. 327.

⁶⁸ Rosenthal, Anton. 341.

⁶⁹ *Wall Street Journal*, 13 August 1904.

“powerless by the current.” St. Louisians gazed upon the “fine electric display” remarking that no display of fireworks could ever equal its brilliance and beauty, adding that “all the colors of the rainbow were seen in the electrical flashes.” As sizzling networks of telegraph, telephone, electric light and rail wires clashed and fell upon the pavement, several people unaware of the danger involved stomped on the wires and leapt from the shock received.⁷⁰ Similar blazes raged in Montevideo as fires became commonplace in the period after 1906 and the addition of trolley cables to the urban infrastructure.⁷¹ Local newspapers reported electrical fires and electrocutions regularly. Yellow presses graphically detailed electrocutions as they described victims clinging lifelessly to live wires suspended forty feet above the ground.⁷² Because gas lighting presented a cheaper and more reliable energy alternative, electricity remained, as late as the mid-1890s, a luxury item.⁷³ Because of its limited access, electricity further increased the rift between social classes as corporations and aristocrats were among the first to acquire and exert power over this mystical force. Increased frequency of electrical related accidents along with sensational news reporting and inequitable access to electricity significantly explain the mystic amazement, ignorance and apprehension that citizens at the turn of the century held in relation to electricity and technological “progress.”

By the close of the nineteenth century electric streetcars came to be considered a legitimate alternative to cable transportation in the United States. Although several small companies by 1887 were successful in installing experimental electrical powered trolleys

⁷⁰ “A Fine Electric Display”. *The New York Times*. 22 October 1890.

⁷¹ Rosenthal, Anton. 330.

⁷² *The New York Times*. 22 April 1897.

⁷³ Platt, Harold L. *The Electric City: Energy and the Growth of the Chicago Area, 1880-1930*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

February 6, 1888 marked the official first day of electric streetcar service in St. Louis.⁷⁴ Opposition from city council members expressing concern regarding overhead wiring in the downtown district slowed the rate of technological substitution and citizens expressed concern that the “existence of so much electricity running through a naked wire suspended above the street would kill the trees and cause sickness.”⁷⁵ By June 17, 1889, electricity gained sufficient usage in the transit industry, that the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* proclaimed “The cable is doomed!”⁷⁶ It would not be until around 1894, however, that electric trolley companies would boom nationally and electric cars would become fully integrated into everyday life. More efficient in terms of speed and cost, electric railways soon became the predominant form of urban transport. In December 1898, at the time the Southern Electric Railway Company purchased the Hamilton Syndicate, 80.37 miles of the 95.04 miles exchanged in St. Louis were electric.⁷⁷ By 1899 cable cars had become obsolete with electric cars replacing all earlier fleets.⁷⁸

In addition to dramatically altering urban transportation, electricity threatened laborers physically and financially. This was because electrification of streetcars increased operating efficiency and allowed the St. Louis Transit Company to remove cars from tracks and dismiss workers believed to be a union threat. Additionally, in the years of increasing streetcar accidents following electrification of the rails, yellow journalism’s gregarious stories, photos, and cartoons of streetcar atrocities played into the workers’ psyche. While workers’ actual risk of electrocution and job loss certainly increased in the years during and immediately following electrical implementation, it was as much the

⁷⁴ Young, Andrew. “The St. Louis Streetcar Story,” 78.

⁷⁵ Veith, Arthur George. *Financial History of Street Railways in St. Louis*

⁷⁶ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. 17 June 1889

⁷⁷ “St. Louis Street Lines Sold”. *The New York Times*. 7 December 1898.

⁷⁸ Veith, Arthur George. *Financial History of Street Railways in St. Louis*, 1943.

perceived fear of such occurrences that led to the explosive reaction against “progress” in Montevideo and St. Louis. Had the workers reacted rationally to heightened risks, the seemingly inevitable strikes and riots could have been averted.

Accidents

Traveling at ten to twenty plus miles per hour, electric cars led to a significant increase in streetcar accidents. A number of newspaper accounts detail these gruesome crashes. Streetcar passengers rode the trains at the risk of “being reduced to an omelet” in the “plague of crashes.”⁷⁹ The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* on June 10, 1901 chronicled one such accident that left two hurt and nearly 100 “shaken up.”⁸⁰ The newspaper attributed the increased frequency in accidents to the Transit Company’s pushing employees towards perfect efficiency. Expected to operate with machine-like precision and speed in order to compensate for the reduced number of electric trams, workers were allotted a meager hour to make the round trip from Tower Grove Park to North Fourth Street or 29 minutes each way with one minute for switching. This stress pushed workers towards a breaking point. Despite the fact that the collision was caused by the Fourth Street Transit workers failure to stop at the crossing of Park Avenue and Grattan Streets, the collision Transit workers defended their comrades. Transit employees seized the opportunity to use the accident’s press coverage to attack the rigidity of the new time schedules stating that such a task “cannot be made except by running 20 miles an hour over a large portion of the distance.”⁸¹ Workers were under such corporate scrutiny and pressure to complete their routes on time that one Suburban conductor after striking a

⁷⁹ Rosenthal, Anton. 331.

⁸⁰ “Two Men Hurt In Car Wreck” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. 10 June 1901.

⁸¹ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. 10 June 1901

sprinkling car and large mule failed to take account of injuries inflicted.⁸² Safety conditions were so hazardous that newly appointed Transit President, Murray Charleston, conceded the alleged increase in street car accidents and launched investigative reform targeted at remedying the “recorded increase of street car accidents in which St.



Louisians have lost life and limb during the period of the last twelve months.”

Furthermore, Charleston found that “the approach of the World’s Fair with its enormous traffic” made it “imperative” that the frequency of streetcar accidents be reduced.⁸³

The Montevideo experience was remarkably similar, as reports emerged of “motormen racing through intersections or around curves without sufficient warning in their attempts to keep to company



Top: A cartoon illustrating the fatal result of overcrowding and excessive speeds on St. Louis streetcar lines. From Charles Delbridge, *Move Forward, Please!* (St. Louis, 1901) Missouri Historical Society Library.

Bottom: “Appropriate Coat-Of-Arms for the St. Louis Street Railways,” illustration from Charles Delbridge, *Move Forward, Please!* (St. Louis, 1901). Missouri Historical Society Library

⁸² *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. 8 May 1900.

⁸³ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. 10 June 1901.

schedules.”⁸⁴ Such sprinting contributed to regular crashes that claimed the lives of pedestrians, tram passengers and cart horses. A St. Louis streetcar accident on September 8, 1899 at the corner of Channing and Lucas Avenues “frightfully mangled” three adults and three children. Negative sentiments of “progress” surfaced following the accident as “men walked up and down the street cursing the railroad company and declaring that the cars were run there regardless of life or limb.” These men continued saying that the “company was making up for the loss of time on the downtown loops by running at railroad speed through the street.” Onlookers following the crash “could not find things bad enough to say about the line and the railway company.”⁸⁵

Local city newspapers and smaller penny presses frequently covered stories of streetcar accidents around the turn of the century. These newspapers and local city pamphlets frequently critiqued modernity through the presentation of gruesome cartoons and biting commentary regarding the atrocities brought about by streetcar “progress”. In February 1895, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* presented a cartoon which depicted the grim reaper flying ahead of a streetcar as men, women, and children displayed faces of horror as they had their “lives crushed by the modern juggernaut.”⁸⁶ Newspapers detailed the “appalling list of streetcar victims in St. Louis” while Charles Delbridge’s well-publicized pamphlet presented a multitude of ghastly illustrations of accidents with satirical undertones. Between March 1894, and February 1895, thirteen St. Louisians were killed by streetcars and an additional 40 or more left injured.⁸⁷ The Montevideo press similarly chronicled local rhetoric and general discontent associated with

⁸⁴ Rosenthal, Anton. 333.

⁸⁵ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. 9 September 1899.

⁸⁶ Young, Andrew. 66. Cartoon found in *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* February 1895.

⁸⁷ Young, Andrew. 62.

“progress.” On June 23, 1907 *La Tribuna Popular* published a gruesome six-column cartoon critique of technological progress. The cartoon included an illustration of a trolley driven by a smiling skeleton crushing people lying in the street. Those caught under the car scream, while a dog and several people flee. Large black birds circled the carnage overhead. The caption below the cartoon read, "Progress is something that appears much like barbarism."⁸⁸

Working Conditions

Citywide consolidation, expansion, and electrification of streetcar service adversely affected Transit employees' work conditions. Electrification and corporate merger sharply reduced the number of trams on St. Louis city lines as management assumed that the speed of the new electric cars could compensate for fewer trolleys. This trolley reduction, beginning in August 1899, allowed management to dispose of peripheral employees suspected of union activity and as one editorial expressed, “save the almighty dollar.”⁸⁹ Remaining employees were expected to pacify outraged customers and furious crowds waiting in extended lines. Overcrowding so enraged the public that they prompted the introduction of a legislative bill on March 3, 1900, a week before the first formal union petition, to amend trolley time tables and “compel street railway companies to operate enough cars to accommodate their patrons.”⁹⁰ Charles Delbridge in his biting attack on the state of urban transportation called for a transition from private ownership to public city transport. Despite harsh criticism, overcrowding

⁸⁸ Rosenthal, Anton. *The Arrival of the Electric Streetcar and the Conflict over Progress in Early Twentieth-Century Montevideo*. 331

⁸⁹ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. March 7, 1900.

⁹⁰ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. March 3, 1900.

only worsened as the number of trolleys was further reduced to charter minimums following inception of the strike.

Trolley reductions, a result of electrification, contributed to a rigidly mechanistic working environment in both St. Louis and Montevideo. Unhappy riders vowed to complain until remedies were produced recommending that the Transit Company “put on more cars” as “fewer would have to stand, and more men would be employed.”⁹¹ Originally an occupation much like that practiced by early craft workers, streetcar motormen and conductors had in the past “performed their duties within a flexible set of work rules and developed personal relationships with their customers, who were often friends and neighbors.”⁹² Streetcar work, however, underwent a significant change in the 1890s due to electrification and the formation of corporate monopolies. Trolley “watchers” or supervisors during this period “insisted on compliance with schedules and operating regulations, proper accounting of tickets and money, the wearing of heavy company uniforms all year long, and ‘proper’ etiquette and courtesy towards the riding public.”⁹³ With the increased leverage gained from monopolization, the St. Louis Transit Company lengthened work shifts from ten and twelve hours to between fourteen and seventeen hours. It was even rumored the company planned to further cut costs by terminating duplicate runs and employees.⁹⁴ Amidst such stress and fatigue, some employees retired rather than deal with the changes while many had no choice but to withstand the rigors of the new industrial discipline. Uninsured, workers were left

⁹¹ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. March 6, 1900. First formal union grievance filed March 10, 1900. Strike to follow.

⁹² Trolley Wars: Streetcar Workers on the Line. Scott Malloy. Review by Michael O. Smith from *Technology and Culture*, Vol 38, January 1997, 255-256.

⁹³ Rosenthal, Anton. 333.

⁹⁴ Hood, Clifton D, “The Workers’ Struggle for Organization: The St. Louis Street Railway Strike of 1900”. Unpublished Senior Honors Thesis, Washington University. 5-7.

vulnerable against legal repercussions if injuring or killing a customer under the high pressure environment.⁹⁵ It is evident considering the adverse effects brought about through electric cars that electrification did not immediately improve the lives of streetcar workers in Montevideo or St. Louis. With the rise of a "machine-like" working order, human labor became discounted as marvelous machines and human ingenuity came to reign supreme.⁹⁶

Reinventing the Past

Organized to showcase exceptional innovations of modernity and progress, the Louisiana Purchase Exposition significantly influenced the historical memory of the St. Louis Transit strike of 1900 and ensuing massacre. Originally scheduled for the summer of 1903 to commemorate centennial of the 1803 Louisiana Purchase, the World's Fair was St. Louis' prime occasion to affirm its exceptional status by topping Chicago's 1893 exposition. Celebrating the wonders of electricity and modern progress, St. Louis constructed a Palace of Electricity in Forest Park as one of its several classically designed display buildings. At night, the fair glowed with a blazing brilliancy equivalent to 6,600,000 candles.⁹⁷ In longing to showcase supreme technological advances and imperial prowess St. Louis and the nation as a whole following the 1901 McKinley assassination had to redefine its recently violent and turbulent past. The destructive violence arising in response to modernity and progress posed a significant threat not only to the Gateway city's reputation but to modernity as a whole. Politicians during the streetcar strike were aware that the world's eyes would soon turn to focus on St. Louis

⁹⁵ Rosenthal, Anton. 336.

⁹⁶ Rosenthal, Anton. 333.

⁹⁷ *The New York Times*, 21 May 1904

during the World’s Fair as the city received \$16 million in funding by June of 1900 to “exhibit the products of the industry and inventive genius of the Nation.” Even prior to receiving funding and official confirmation on June 5, 1900, St. Louis was under heightened scrutiny as a potential host city. Many city officials feared being “disgraced before this country and the world, as a community incapable of maintaining Law and Order.”⁹⁸ In a matter of three years, politicians and the local media had to transform St. Louis, a city in 1900 consumed by bloodshed and discontent over modernity into a radiant beacon of “progress”, a twentieth century “city on a hill.”

Revising the past in order to legitimize authority and defend progress proved to be a critical project during the strike as well as in the years leading up to the 1904 World’s Fair. At a time when enthusiasm for technological “progress” was to be celebrated, cynical attitudes and negative collective memories were being formed in relation to modernity. Diversion



Night view of the Palace of Electricity at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition as St. Louis celebrates and showcases the wonders of technological “progress” in the wake electricity’s catalytic role in spurring the St. Louis Transit Strike of 1900. Photograph from the Douglas Ellis Family Collection (1904). Denver Public Library.

attempts and cover-ups operated to conceal the bloodshed and anarchy raging in St. Louis over the definition of technological “progress.” This is apparent in documentation of former Missouri governor and St. Louis mayor David R. Francis’ visit to New York in

⁹⁸ Reedy, William Marion. *The Story of the Strike*. 2.

June of 1900. During this visit, Francis trumpeted the “splendor” and “great enthusiasm of the World’s Fair to be held in the City of St. Louis.”⁹⁹ Meanwhile, the streets of his golden city were in the possession of a mob. In a similar way, acting Missouri Governor Stephens’ refused to activate state militia in an attempt to defend St. Louis’ deteriorating image. Although Stephens in May 1900 refused to explain whether his promise to “use promptly the full power of the State to restore and preserve peace” meant that he would call out the militia, he ultimately placed his supreme focus on city’s perceived image.¹⁰⁰ In June, Stephens delivered a more candid quote asserting, “I would rather call out 50,000 men who are not in the militia to serve in the Sheriff’s posse than to place on St. Louis the stigma of requiring troops to keep the peace.”¹⁰¹ Defending the city’s elite, a *Mirror* reporter stationed within the posse barracks on the day of the Washington Avenue massacre reported that “when the prisoners were searched, a dozen revolvers, many wire-cutters and brass ‘knucks’ were found in their pockets,” although contemporary scholarship holds that the marching strikers were unarmed.¹⁰² As a result of the “incapacity or chicanery or ambition of small politicians” and the media, strikers became immediately identified with illegitimacy and lawlessness.¹⁰³

Numerous media accounts immediately following the Washington Avenue Massacre demonized strikers and their supporters for instigating the June 10, 1900 ambush. Stories of armed strikers, however, were offset with stories of an unprovoked assault. Such witness accounts of the massacre that legitimized authority and exonerated strikers, however, were likely omitted from the historical record. James P. Klotz was one

⁹⁹ “One Month of Mob Rule” *The New York Times*. 9 June 1900.

¹⁰⁰ *The New York Times*. 14 May 1900.

¹⁰¹ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. 3 June 1900.

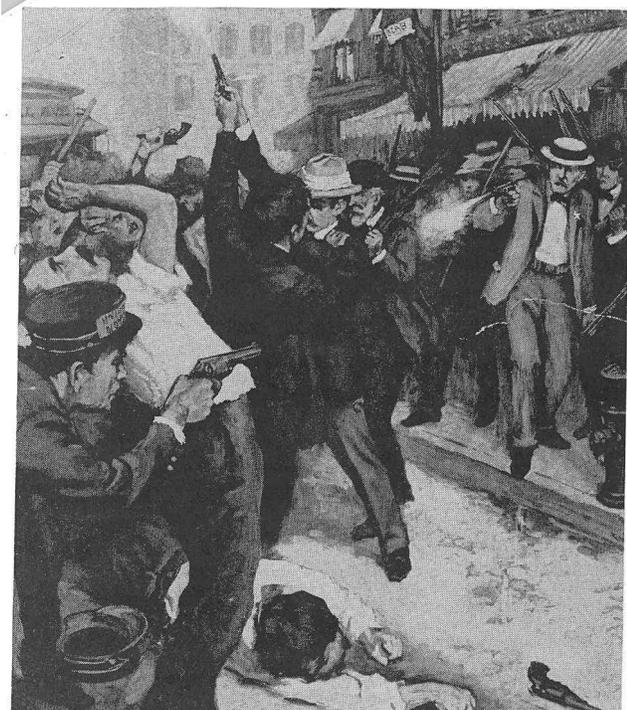
¹⁰² See Young, Dina M. "The St. Louis Streetcar Strike of 1900." *Gateway Heritage* (1991): 2-17.

¹⁰³ Reedy, William. 22.

such witness. Viewing the shootings from a Lindell Hotel window, Klotz denied seeing any firearms in the hands of the strikers. Believing it his public duty, Klotz relayed his story in the form of several letters to local newspapers following the incident. After reciting Klotz's newspaper testimony back, the coroner asked if all information was transcribed correctly. Klotz bravely responded, "It is, in the main, but omits what I considered was one of the strongest statements in the letter. I observed that arms had been placed in the hands of irresponsible persons."¹⁰⁴ Although Klotz's story has fortunately been captured, there is little way to know the precise number of accounts that were conspicuously edited out of the historical record in preparation for the 1904 World's Fair.

In addition to defending the established authorities from harsh criticism in the media, the media criminalized strikers for invoking the violence that resulted in the Washington Avenue Massacre. The nearly immediate censure of strikers is evident in *Colliers Weekly's* June 30, 1900

rendering of the Washington Avenue Massacre. Nearly three weeks after the slaughter on Washington and Sixth in which the instigating party remained uncertain, a *Colliers'* artist placed guns in the hands of the marching streetcar workers returning from the support rally. By 1904, the year of the long awaited World's Fair,



Washington Avenue Massacre of June 10, 1900. Illustration from *Collier's Weekly*, June 30, 1900, in *Streetcar Strike Papers*, Missouri Historical Society Archives

¹⁰⁴ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. 13 June 1900.

newspapers praised the wonders of the telegraph on the anniversary of the massacre. Papers remained devoid of stories commemorating the bloody riot of June 10, 1900 that left three dead and fourteen wounded. These instances demonstrate the historical reinvention of history occurring in preparation for the 1904 World's Fair. Images legitimizing elites and conspicuous editing almost certainly shaped the world's perception of the strike, progress and modernity. These examples reveal the conscious attempt to conceal the city's scars, rescue modernity's reputation and legitimize corporate and governmental authority. While editing certain stories out of the historical record is difficult to detect, manipulation of historical memory of the strike also took a more visible form following the Louisiana Purchase Expo as the guns used in slaying strikers during the Washington Avenue Massacre became objects paraded through the streets during the annual "riot gun parade".¹⁰⁵

World's fairs traditionally are viewed as occasions in which to voice grievances. Surprisingly, my limited research yielded no public record of any such attempt made on behalf of the transit employees. Why did the transit employees fail to use the world's stage as a forum in which to air grievances? Were transit workers simply too dispirited following the strike in 1900 to reorganize, or had their movement been co-opted by company concessions and minute victories? Although these questions remain unanswered, historical scholarship has led us to a point we may now seek these answers.

Conclusion

As has been argued, corporate consolidation in conjunction with streetcar expansion and electrification altered the nature of streetcar work near the turn of the century in both St. Louis and Montevideo. These technological, market, and cultural

¹⁰⁵ Young, Dina M. "The St. Louis Streetcar Strike of 1900." Gateway Heritage (1991).

changes created an environment ripe for revolution as seen in the violent St. Louis Transit strike of 1900. Comparing Montevideo's reaction to modernity with St. Louis' response to "progress" allows arguments of exceptionalism to be dismissed while the true catalysts behind these spells of activism rise to the surface. Moreover, this essay sheds light on the manipulation of the strike's historical memory in preparation for the World's Fair of 1904. While corporate merger, expansion and electrification were not the only forces of change that led to the strikes to mass disenchantment with "progress," these cultural elements add depth and complexity to a story previously limited in cultural analysis. Without the technological and cultural changes brought about through electrification and expansion of streetcar service, the labor strikes and social unrest raging in Montevideo and St. Louis would not only have been less likely but would have been unthinkable.

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This scathing book distributed the year following the transit strike served of primary use in gauging the public sentiment following the electrification and consolidation into the St. Louis Transit Company. Delbridge's book includes numerous satirical cartoons and mocking commentaries regarding overcrowding and frequency of accidents. The publication's preface establishes Delbridge's style and belief in discourse as a course for change asserting, "If every time you hang onto a strap of a street car, you will send or give some friend a copy of this book, in a short while you will find it not necessary to hang onto that strap". Delbridge ultimately calls for government involvement in removing the urban transportation system from the hands of private capitalists and making street car transportation a public good.

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Rosenthal's essays serve as the case study in which to compare the St. Louis experience. These articles are central to my argument as Rosenthal focuses great attention to the role electrification and expansion played in prompting the general strike of 1911. Rosenthal's articles provided the "lens" in which to investigate and reinterpret the St. Louis Transit Strike of 1900. Discourse surrounding the definition of "progress" and public space was especially useful.

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St. Louis Post-Dispatch. 1898-1906

The *Post-Dispatch* provided the brunt of my local information regarding the Transit Strike of 1900, Louisiana Purchase Exposition of 1904 and other connected events vital to my thesis including electrical fires, streetcar accidents and political commentary. Easily accessible and detailed, the *Post-Dispatch* offered front page coverage of the strike over the entire summer of 1900. Its relatively unbiased observations and photographs were immensely useful in reconstructing the St. Louis Transit Strike of 1900.

St. Louis Republic. 1899-1904.

The only newspaper dating back to 1900 currently housed at the Missouri Historical Society. This was the most prominent paper in St. Louis during most of the nineteenth century only to be replaced by the *Post-Dispatch*. Information regarding paper's political affiliation and primary readership were pursued but never discovered.

St. Louis Star. 1900

The Montevideo Times 14 May 1911.

The New York Times. 1899-1910

New York Times covered the events of the St. Louis transit strike extremely closely during the summer of 1900. Although not as detailed as local St. Louis newspapers, the *NYT* online database was useful in locating significant dates of striker insurrections. *The New York Times* online database also allowed for access to World's Fair information, and dates of large electrical fires and streetcar accidents that could later be used in uncovering local accounts of the fires, etc. The distance and removal from the source of the story was at times beneficial.

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Veith's history focused on the financial state of the street railways from their inception up unto the 1960s and their replacement by busses and vehicular transport. A significant focus of Veith's work deals with the year of consolidation and soon following, as bonds were issued to finance expansion. Source served of little use to this essay.

Wall Street Journal 13 Aug. 1904.

Although an outside news source much like the *New York Times* in the context of analyzing the St. Louis transportation system, the *WSJ* was useful as an accessible and searchable online medium. While large and distant news sources have their drawback, dates and stories of large electrical fires and streetcar accidents could be found electronically in a much easier manner than scrolling manually through rolls of microfilm.

Wilson, William H. The City Beautiful movement. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1989.

Young, Andrew D. The St. Louis Streetcar Story. Glendale: Interurban, 1988.

Young, Dina M. "The St. Louis Streetcar Strike of 1900." Gateway Heritage (1991): 2-17.

Young's dissertation is the best current scholarship regarding the St. Louis Transit Strike of 1900. Providing commentary on many available primary and secondary sources, Young takes a well-balanced look at the environment in which the transit strike arose. Young assesses the Collier's photo featured, but fails to detail its relationship to the World's Fair of 1904.