**What killed the Streetcars in the Twin Cities?**

**(Picture 2)**

Outline:

For this project we would like to look into the history of the streetcar in the Twin Cities. More specifically, we would like to delve into the question: What was the streetcar industry like with regards to the question of “What killed the streetcar?” For many the streetcar was a cheap, environmentally-friendly way to travel, as well as a good way to maintain public transportation.

However, with the introduction of the automobile, the streetcar began to face many problems. The Great Depression forced the prices of revenue to increase, while the automobile industry, added to the new bus systems, created transit congestion problems for the streetcar as a main competitor to the automotive industry.

For many “the market” was the cause of the decline of the streetcar, while others believe an active plan to dismantle it was orchestrated behind the scenes. Throughout the United States, people have claimed how one could make a connection between the end of the streetcar and the growth of the automobile companies throughout many cities. Later on, the light shed on G.M.’s, Chrysler’s, and Ford’s “unfair business practices” and illegal business practices made this “seamless transition” to the car questionable.

The dates seem to line up throughout the United States, and in some cases companies like General Motors were taken to court for anti-trust charges, as with the case in 1974.

We therefore seek to explore two main areas in this work:

1) The history of the streetcar in the Twin Cities and the hegemonic viewpoints with regards to its decline.

2) Consider the Twin Cities’ case in the broader context of the United States and the dismantling of the streetcar nationwide, considering the plausible connection to car companies in the end of the streetcar.

Locations: Downtown Minneapolis by the main light rail hub (illustrates what public transit lines are still intact compared to previous lines); The Minneapolis Streetcar museum, would illustrate what the streetcar looks like (doesn’t open till May) located outside Lake Harriet; The Ford Plant (illustrates the difficulty that the public transit system has left, in visiting logistically close areas, but forces a far out impractical path of transit).

**(Picture 1)**

**Part 2 (The Conclusions from research)**

While this project served as an overview of the history of the Streetcar in the Twin Cities in Minnesota, the seemingly apolitical nature of the of the transition from the streetcar to the automobile, as well as the poor research available on the subject matter turned the focus from a simple historical overview into a short and concise overview of the political maneuvers “behind the scenes” in these matters. While many people largely dismissed any consideration for the political issues behind by calling them “conspiracy theories,” but the idea that the market’s “invisible hand” was the only cause of the decline of an entire system of transportation did not seem convincing. In conclusion, what began as a project on the history of the streetcar turned more into a project on the debates surrounding the implementation of the light rail all across the United States.

We originally planned on looking into the history of Ford Motors in the Twin Cities, as the streetcar system in the Twin Cities was hailed by many to be the best in the United States, and also because Fordism in general is an interesting topic to delve into at the turn of the century. None of the sources on Fordism referred specifically to Minneapolis and St. Paul, so our focus switched to the history of the cities instead, finding the streetcar along with them.

Few sources were available, and only a small percentage had an academic rigor. Through our readings, we noticed that the bibliography on the transition from the streetcar to the automobile had much to say about the *economic* factors in the decline of the streetcar, but little to say about its *political* factors. The fact that such a vast transformation would only include economic data, but did not include any information on the political debates throughout the century led us to look into the authors’ only source on the “myths” behind this transformation.

Some of these economic factors are embodied in what was dubbed the “Jitney Craze”. Jitneys were automobiles that offered to carry passengers along fixed routes, usually parallel to existing streetcar routes. The fare was usually a nickel, and the slang for a nickel was a “jitney”. These routes were must faster and more frequent than the streetcar – this caused as much as a 50% loss of riders for the electronic streetcar (Slater 48). Some of these Jitney routes were only run during rush-hour, which allowed for a much higher profit margin. The businessmen behind the electronic streetcars made an attempt for Legislation to be taken against these routes. This resulted in many different requirements for the Jitney operators to continue operating. Some examples of the legislation were that they were forced to pay liability bonds, which amounted to approximately 25-50% of their net earnings (Slater 48).

**(Picture 3)**

We began reading chapters and sections from Diers’ and Isaacs’ Twin Cities by Trolley where we were given an overview of the history of public transportation in Minneapolis and St. Paul. However, only a few pages towards the end of the book were dedicated to debunking the myth of the so called “conspiracy theories” surrounding Ford, Chrysler and GM. The authors cited Cliff Slater. Aside from Bradford C. Snell’s report, Slater seemed to be the only reliable source which looked into the matter. However, his debunking of the myth coupled an almost direct frontal attack on the streetcar. Online, he was also the only source journalists cited in this debate, which was problematic as the author clearly had some ideological bias, and no one seemed to notice.

Slater’s article does a good job of providing the economic data over the years in the Twin Cities and of attacking what he would consider to be a “conspiracy.” It is interesting however that even he does not deny the charges brought against the three car companies that not only put pressure on other companies but also were only charged a minor fee for it. It should also be regarded that the article only focuses on one aspect of the entire *process* these companies are involved in. His article, as well as most of the other short sources, have very little to say about the broad transformations in U.S. city planning, the political efforts car companies had, and the aid the government provided them with. In only focusing on one particular case, one may forget other cases, such as the destruction of the electric car, the government investment and subsidy of car companies, and the ways in which Fordism contributed to this cause by planning cities in such a way that citizens had no option *but* to buy a car.

As we looked further into the author, we realized that he had no information was available on his academic background, but we did find that he was an activist against the new light-rails in Hawaii. We also found out that he had been previously associated with the “Reason Foundation,” one of the many non-profit organizations funded by the Koch Brothers industry. While a simple look at the data seems innocent, the author’s ideological background is deeply hard to see without further research. We began to look further into other associations the author was in, and came to the conclusion that he was only *one* of the may activists who worked for a giant web of “non-profit” organizations, all in some way or another tied into the Koch Brothers industry, a leading corporation on gas, oil, and most notably the keystone pipeline.

**Picture (4)**

What we were able to draw from this presentation is the fact that corporations need only to “pay” for academic rigor. The money they can provide for research, even if with skewed data, is enough to convince people all across the political spectrum of their argument. Indeed, the author’s work was taken by many as an absolute indefinite truth, while the report we later found, Evaluating Rail Transit Criticisms was nowhere to be seen within people’s citations. This project served not only to learn about the history of public transportation, it more importantly served to show how easily knowledge can be “bought,” and how ideological “truth” can be.

The main focus of our research was analyzing General Motors response to the 1974 monopoly law suit brought against the company. When general motors came out with a reply to the charges that were brought against them, specifically the claims that they had invested within the National City lines, a Minnesota transportation company that was founded in 1920 and was viewed as a modest local transport company who operated two buses. National City lines was later reorganized into a holding company in 1936 with equity from General Motors, Firestone Tire, Standard Oil of California and Philips Petroleum. GM claimed “that the modest amount of financial assistance to national city lines, did not have any effect on their decisions to convert from streetcars to busses.” (GM 20) Specifically the $500,000 investment which GM made in National City Lines in 1939, and subsequent investments in American City Lines (a National Subsidiary) in 1943, and Pacific City lines (1938) were made at the request of those companies, which had experienced difficulties raising money from other sources, totaling in $2.9 million between the three companies (GM 21).

It is however notable that National City Lines was indicted in 1947 and convicted in the United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois of conspiring to monopolize the sale of buses and related products to the local transit companies that they controlled.

Additionally, the busses that each line had requested came at the request from the customers themselves, and were negotiated after the customers had requested them. General Motors claimed that their share of the companies were lower after the bus acquisition contracts than they were before, and the contracts were found to be in violation of antitrust laws only in connection with the overall arrangements between City Lines and its suppliers.

Manuel Berduc and Matthew White

Pictures 5,6,7, 8

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