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If You're Not Black You're White: A History of Ethnic Relations in St. Louis

ETHNICITY IN ST. LOUIS IS POLARIZED around a white-versus-black antagonism that melts non-blacks into the category of whites. Discrimination against blacks in St. Louis is best understood in regional historical context as the political-economic and cultural confrontation of three societies—southern plantation, western rural, and northern industrial. This historical case study—from Indian conquest through black slavery and the Civil War to a 1917 industrial race riot and finally today's "rust belt" decay—reveals how ideologies generated around ethnicity interact with political structures to drive social processes in as important a manner as do more strictly material or economic forces. [African-Americans, ethnic discrimination, Midwest urban U.S., history of race relations, St. Louis]

—"I'm gonna get me a gun and shoot me some Kans."

—"Huh?"

—"Yeah. Keep them MexiKans, Puerto RiKans, and AfriKans outa my neighborhood [chuckle]."

—"What happened to the light post?"

—"Some damn fool nigger drove into it. Mashed himself up pretty good [chuckle]."

—"Where are you from?"

—"New York."

—"Oh, I hate New York—too many blacks and Puerto Ricans."

—"Let me tell you something. I've never talked with a white man before who wasn't either drunk or angry or both [chuckle]."

—"Oh, come on, man! That's crazy!"

—"No, I'm serious. It's nice to meet you [shakes hands]."

TO SOME, THE RACIST CONTENT IN THE FIRST THREE of these conversations with St. Louisans might not appear exceptional. Such commentaries might be overheard anywhere in the United States. What surprised me, as a newly transplanted northeasterner, was that racism was expressed casually

and unhesitatingly only moments after initiation of a conversation. It never occurred to the speakers that I might not share their loathing for non-whites. Even more surprising to me at the time was that the three racist statements were made out loud in public in University City, one of St. Louis's only integrated suburban communities, renowned for its liberal attitudes. White racists from New York probably would not dare use such language to someone they had never spoken to before, almost certainly not if they were meeting for the first time in a community of mixed ethnicity.

Similarly, the content of the fourth conversation with a young African-American St. Louisan might not appear unusual. His statement could easily characterize the experience of millions of young blacks and Hispanics in many of the major northeastern cities. The difference, however, is that most blacks in the Northeast probably would not have been particularly interested in making friends with a white stranger merely on the basis of a few minutes of uneventful conversation. More important, even if they had been, they would probably hesitate before admitting it.

Introduction

Ethnic relations in St. Louis are exceptionally polarized around a southern-style white-versus-black dichotomy. The city occupies a privileged geographical location at the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers in the heartland of the United States, enabling it to proclaim itself the "Gateway to the West." St. Louis is a southern border-state city in the former slave state (currently Bible Belt hinterland) of Missouri. Despite frustrated pretensions at being a world-class industrial urban center, St. Louis's population, cultural traditions, and political atmosphere are uncompromisingly (and increasingly) southern and provincial. The city must be understood in its polarized historical context as the tripartite economic and cultural crossroads of southern rural, western rural, and northern industrial society, resulting in a black/white interethnic relationship characterized according to Hunter (1980:Foreword) by "a great deal of schizophrenia . . . [and] a great deal of trauma." The ferocity of white negro-phobia in St. Louis has imposed a white identity on non-black but non-white new immigrants in keeping with a classic U.S. melting-pot definition of ethnicity (see articles by Inoue and Rynearson, this issue).

On repeated occasions the state of Missouri and the city of St. Louis have made it necessary for the nation to confront brutally the internal contradictions and inconsistencies of racism taken to their logical conclusions. Some of North America's bitterest black/white confrontations have originated in St. Louis—played out in Congress, the Supreme Court, and on Civil War battlefields. Missouri caused heated racial controversy even before existence as a state in 1821. Its request for admission to the Union as a slave state precipitated Congress's most bitterly contested debate over slavery, resulting in Henry Clay's slave-state compromise. This racial confrontation was further fueled by the 1852 Dred Scott case, originating in St. Louis courts, through which blacks were formally stripped of citizens' rights by the U.S. Supreme Court. Missouri also participated in bloody dress rehearsals for the Civil War in the 1850s, including raids into Kansas against John Brown by "hordes of Missouri ruffians" (Oates 1970:69ff.). This

climaxed toward the end of the Civil War with civilian massacres by locally based pro-Confederate guerrilla bands that enjoyed widespread popular support in Missouri.

Racism and Deep South-style discriminatory cultural institutions have continued to thrive in St. Louis since the Civil War. It became the first city to pass a housing segregation ordinance by popular petition in 1916; the following year it hosted the nation's bloodiest black/white race riot of the 20th century. At the same time St. Louis is a cosmopolitan urban center on the edge of the South. It boasts the first black high school in the nation. It has one of the highest rates of black urbanization, and was the site for the first legal challenges to segregated education prior to *Brown vs. Board of Education* (Topeka, Kansas). St. Louis also originated the case that resulted in the 1948 Supreme Court ruling against restrictive deed covenants in housing.

The contemporary expression of St. Louis's southern ideology and social structure, so provocatively straitjacketed in northern-style industrial infrastructure and western geographic location, is the city's astounding record of poverty and ethnic segregation. St. Louis has experienced the most dramatic middle-class white flight to the suburbs of any metropolis in the nation, and it has suffered the highest overall urban population loss of any city during the 1950–80 decades—dropping 47 percent from 857,000 to 453,000 and losing an additional 5.5 percent by January 1988 (St. Louis Post-Dispatch 1988a). The same source reports that during the 1980s the inner suburbs of the city grew by 4.2 percent, while some of the outer suburbs grew by as much as 32.5 percent. St. Louis has one of the highest rates of residential segregation (housing dissimilarity index) and one of the largest gaps between black and white income levels of any major urban center in the United States (Farley 1983; Leven 1972; Little, Nourse, and Phaires 1975).

The history of black/white relations in St. Louis is so polarized that it almost caricatures race relations in the United States. On the level of theory, consequently, this case study provides an opportunity to gauge the extent to which ideological processes (i.e., belief systems that charge power relations) shape a region's historical development. A political-economic dynamic with a degree of economic logic has resonated historically with the pattern of ethnic immigration and black/white polarization in St. Louis. However, repeated political mobilizations of the city, in what—with the benefit of hindsight—proves to be a self-destructive commitment to a model of Deep South racism, underscore the power of ideas in shaping history. By focusing on how ideologies generated around ethnicity have driven political culture, the central roles of ideas in history can be appreciated. Economic reductionism cannot account for St. Louis's current patterns of ethnic polarization, and a strictly economic interpretation cannot explain the city's material decline from its heyday in the mid-1800s.

Indian Slavery under French and Spanish Rule

St. Louis was founded formally as a fur-trading village in 1764 by a party of French traders coming upriver from New Orleans. Ethnic relations in the region had been profoundly charged before the physical presence of the French settlement. Indian societies and cultures were being violently disrupted and reconsti-

tuted in a hierarchical manner by the economic effects of warfare over hunting territories and slave-raiding instigated by the new trade relations with Europeans (see Wolf 1982:159–182). By the 1660s the Illinois Indians were regularly raiding the Sioux, the Pawnee, and the Osage, while the Missouri Indians were raiding the Wichita and Pawnee. The bulk of the slaves obtained from the Indian peoples in the region were traded via the English in Charleston, South Carolina, for shipment to West Indian sugar plantations (Magnaghi 1975:264–265). The disorder caused by this Indian warfare periodically prompted the French who claimed colonial control over the region to limit slave trade. Indian slavery was declared illegal along the Missouri and Arkansas rivers, but the official French government position was ambiguous and French settlers, including the priests at Cahokia (across the Mississippi River from St. Louis), possessed Indian slaves (Magnaghi 1975:265; Trexler 1914:80). Through the late 1700s Indian slaves predominated over black slaves among the French settlers (Magnaghi 1975:266).

At the end of the French administration in 1770 the village of St. Louis had a population of between 350 and 500 people, including approximately 69 Indian slaves owned by 36 white owners (Troen and Holt 1977:9–15; Magnaghi 1975:267). These slaves were used as domestic labor rather than plantation labor and many accompanied European traders on their expeditions. When the Spanish took over the Louisiana territory in 1769 they decreed laws intended to end Indian slavery in order to defuse warfare and improve the climate for the fur trade. Although Spanish authorities failed to enforce these laws, Indian slavery was already on the decline by the time of Spanish rule.

Emancipation of the indigenous people was hastened by political and economic expediency. In the brief interval from 1766 to 1804 St. Louis passed from French control to Spanish control, back to French rule, and finally over to the U.S. government. In the 1600s and 1700s, the illegal presence of British traders in the region made the Spanish and French eager to improve relations with the Indians. Furthermore, it was relatively easy for Indian slaves to escape and survive in the surrounding countryside undetected. However, it was not until 1834 when St. Louis had already been under U.S. control for 30 years that Indian slavery was finally ended formally as the result of a legal settlement in a case before the Missouri supreme court that had actually originated under French rule (Magnaghi 1975:272; Trexler 1914:80–81).

Interethnic Relations during the Settlement Period

African slaves replaced the labor force lost by freeing Indians. The first large group of black slaves (up to 500) came from Haiti in 1719 to work in the lead mines southwest of present-day St. Louis (Corbett 1983:17). According to a Spanish census of 1799, the population of St. Louis village was composed of 601 free whites, 56 free blacks, and 268 slaves (Christensen 1972:1). Much of the discussion about interethnic relations during this period is speculative, but some historians claim that slavery was relatively less oppressive under French and Spanish subjugation:

During French and Spanish rule . . . a closer and freer relationship between blacks and whites existed than was the case after the American Protestants established control after the Louisiana Purchase in 1804. [Christensen 1972:1]

Statistics reveal that under the French there were more manumissions (especially of Indian slaves). The Catholic church also acknowledged the humanity of slaves, and Africans and Indians participated in the Catholic sacraments. In fact, the French codes noirs which remained in force under Spanish rule required the church to proselytize slaves. At the same time, however, increasing numbers of slave-owning Anglo-Americans took refuge on the St. Louis side of the Mississippi River, which was under Spanish control when slavery was prohibited in the American colonies in 1787 (Lecompte 1970:300).

There is a somewhat ambiguous consensus that slave conditions may not have been as brutal in St. Louis as they were in the Deep South (Greene, Kremer, and Holland 1980; Christensen 1972; Bellamy 1972). Most owners in Missouri held few slaves (an average of four), and with the exception of the rural counties of central Missouri known as "the Boonslick," most slaves were not subjected to plantation labor. The weather and ecology limited the length of the cotton growing season.

More important is the legacy of French and Spanish Creole culture. Racial differentiation and discrimination under the French and Spanish were ambiguous and inconsistent. Anthropologist Virginia Dominguez documents in her book on Creoles in Louisiana how ethnicity was drastically redefined along more strictly racial lines following the U.S. purchase of the Louisiana territories (1986). The same ambiguous, malleable New Orleans black/Creole/French/Spanish/Indian "color line" must have prevailed in St. Louis under French and Spanish rule. Although one never knows how much sexist and racist fantasy there is in historical interpretations, scholars claim that the "French 'voyageurs' mingled with the natives and produced a mixed race" to a greater extent than did the Anglo settlers (Trexler 1914:79). Slaves are reported to have spoken French even after the American takeover of St. Louis (Reichard 1976:4). One of the most popular folk heroes of St. Louis at the turn of the 19th century was a "French" slave named Cascotte, renowned for daring exploits. There is also strong evidence of the emergence of a "colored elite" perhaps reminiscent of the Creole hierarchy in New Orleans (Christensen 1974; Clamorgan 1974; Day and Kedro 1974:120–121). Some St. Louis free blacks owned slaves in the 19th century, even though this was illegal by U.S. law (Bellamy 1972:212).

The archives of the St. Louis law courts contain the same ironic law cases documented by Dominguez (1986) for New Orleans. Individuals of mixed African/Indian and European descent desperately sued to change their official racial status in order to recover lost economic and social privileges taken from them by the imposition of the rigidly exclusive U.S.-defined color line (Magnaghi 1975:272; Trexler 1914:80–81). Some free blacks, for example, had owned significant extensions of land granted to them by the previous Spanish and French governments (Bellamy 1972:217). The Missouri legislature during the winter of 1824–25 revised the laws on free blacks and introduced a new category of "mulatto" (Reichard 1976:11). There is some evidence during the early period of U.S. rule in St. Louis that whites "expressed . . . ambivalence about forcefully

administering black codes which repressed the freedom, individuality, and dignity of their established 'colored' citizens" (Reichard 1976:4).

According to eyewitnesses, race relations became more sharply polarized between 1830 and 1840 when the city ceased being a French town and the population jumped from 6,694 to 16,469. Most of the new immigrants to St. Louis were either Germans or Americans from the slave states of Kentucky and Virginia, imbued with southern-style racism (Bush 1951:64). By 1835 St. Louis citizens spontaneously formed vigilante groups to enforce the city's repressive black laws (which included the sanction of whipping free blacks) because they felt the political authorities were too lenient (Christensen 1972:15).

Statistics also suggest that slavery in Missouri and especially in St. Louis was qualitatively different from slavery in the rest of the southern United States. Missouri had the lowest ratio of slave population to white population and the highest proportion of free blacks—essentially all residing in St. Louis (Christensen 1972:5). Furthermore, urban slave conditions, while always onerous and dehumanizing, were less oppressive than in the rural, plantation setting. This would have been especially the case for the disproportionate number of enslaved St. Louisians who were able to hire themselves out as artisans. The practice of hiring out created ideological contradictions for the institution of slavery and allowed slaves greater room for maneuvering (including greater opportunities to escape or to purchase their freedom). In any case, slavery was marginal to the economy of St. Louis; although blacks represented 25 percent of the urban population in 1830, by 1860 they were only 2 percent (Day and Kedro 1974:117; Hunter 1974). At the outbreak of the Civil War there were more free blacks in St. Louis than slaves (Bellamy 1972:212). This was the same period during which St. Louis went through its most rapid economic growth, with the population increasing sixteen-fold.

St. Louis's economic boom in the first half of the 19th century was the result of its strategic location as a commercial gateway for the fur trade and as the place of provisionment for the territories annexed from Mexico, the settlement of the northwestern upriver country, and the western gold rush (Belcher 1947:12–13). The city reached its apogee in the late 1820s and 1830s when steamship transport was dominant. St. Louis's location near the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi rivers made it a transportation breakpoint where large boats from downstream unloaded their cargoes into small boats that could navigate further upstream, and vice versa (Primm 1983:10). During the 1820s it called itself the "steamboat capital of the world" and was "the nation's second largest port in tonnage, exceeded only by New York" (Leven 1972:4). Surrounded by the country's largest deposits of iron and lead ore and close to inexpensive supplies of coal in Illinois, St. Louis also became a focal point for the iron industry. The city became the nation's leading producer of paints, steamboat machinery, stoves, nails, and ironware. During this period St. Louis called itself "the New York of the West" and was persuaded that its commercial domination of the Mississippi and Missouri valleys would make it "the most central of the large cities in the United States" (Belcher 1947:13). In 1870 the total value of manufactured products in St. Louis was exceeded only by two other cities in the nation, New York and Philadelphia (Savage 1987:viii). St. Louis was able to "dismiss Chicago as an upstart village whose boasts were not to be taken seriously" (Belcher

1947:13). St. Louisans even tried to have the capital of the United States moved to their location (Belcher 1947:14).

The Self-Destructive Stranglehold of the Southern Oligarchy

St. Louis's strategic commercial location, however, ultimately led to economic conservatism, inertia, and the loss of control of the Mississippi hinterlands to Chicago. St. Louis trade was composed entirely of river traffic along a north/south axis. The elite of St. Louis identified with the south rather than with the eastern capitalists of New York and Boston who were busy investing in a new east/west commercial axis via Chicago. Significantly, Chicago's trade nexus had always been east/west because its lakeport connected to the Erie Canal (completed in 1825). Chicago, therefore, was physically linked to New York City, giving it preferential access to the biggest capital markets and most dynamic investors of the nation (Schnell 1977:260).

In a somewhat polemical book, the historian George Belcher argues that St. Louis was overtaken economically by Chicago precisely because of the faulty values of St. Louis's economic elite, which he claims was composed of a reactionary coterie of southern-style aristocrats devoid of business acumen and atavistically clinging to steamship river transport long after the advent of railroads:

The ruling characteristic of St. Louis business men was their conservatism. They were not imaginative men, nor were they filled with the ambition to build up a new country. [1947:115]

The innate conservatism of St. Louis made it more difficult for the city to access realistically the transportation problem brought about by the construction of railroads. . . . The river city had its money tied up in steamboats which could not compete successfully with the railroads. St. Louis clung to the old method of river transportation even after it was apparent that Chicago was using the railroads to divert commerce from the Upper Mississippi Valley at a rapid rate. [1947:15]

Other historians have referred to the "general conservatism of St. Louis capitalists—their slowness in adopting new ideas and techniques" (Rammelkamp 1963:336). They also attribute the lack of innovative enterprise of the "conservative and monopolistic oligarchy" of St. Louis to the "aristocratic atmosphere, mainly derived from Southern traditions. With a leadership whose ancestry was in large part Virginian and Kentuckian, St. Louis's upper circles were steeped in a caste-like tradition contrasting sharply with the egalitarianism of the frontier-descended Middle West" (Rammelkamp 1963:337). In dollars-and-cents reality, this meant that St. Louis's established, southern-oriented capitalists were bound up in technologically obsolete investments rooted in the steamship river trade. New, incoming entrepreneurs in St. Louis did not have access to the sources of capital that Chicago was tapping in New York and Boston during this same period.

The compromise which gave the state of Missouri slavery undoubtedly retarded its economic development as compared with the free commonwealth of Illinois. Enterprising Easterners preferred to settle in Chicago rather than take a chance

in the more populous River city. St. Louis was a border city. . . . Since Missouri was a slave state, and since the Mississippi River gave St. Louis easy access to New Orleans, the city's economic interests lay chiefly in the South. [Belcher 1947:16]

According to Belcher, St. Louisans almost mystically subscribed to a "specious economic theory according to which commerce must move along the meridians [north/south] instead of east and west" (1947:16–17).

James Neal Primm (1983, 1984), with other historians of Missouri, takes exception to Belcher's "southern elite slowpoke" explanation for the relative decline of St. Louis's economy. Nevertheless, even if there were more Yankee businessmen involved in the St. Louis economy than Belcher acknowledges (see Primm 1981), the astounding fact remains that Chicago, which in the 1810s was just a tiny cow town, had surpassed St. Louis by 1880. In 1870 St. Louis was the fourth-largest city in the country, and it has been declining ever since. Today it is the thirtieth-largest city in the United States and falling fast; even if one includes its suburbs, St. Louis still ranks only fourteenth nationally in the size of its Metropolitan Statistical Area.

The failure of St. Louis—or rather the state of Missouri—to invest in railroads and road transport was crucial in accelerating the region's demise. During the 1830s Missouri was "the only western state that failed to develop a program of financial aid for the construction of transportation infrastructure" (Schnell 1977:254). This was in large part because the majority Democratic party, which controlled state politics, was dominated by the rural planter aristocracy, which refused to raise taxes for projects that benefited primarily the city of St. Louis (Schnell 1977:254). In 1853 Chicago had 7,650 miles of railway either completed or under construction, connecting it with Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. Missouri at this same date had not completed a single road (Schnell 1977:258). "By the outbreak of the Civil War, Missouri had constructed only 796 miles of road" (Schnell 1977:265). When the railroad was finally built, the east/west connection was with the southern border city of Baltimore rather than with the real center of dynamic capital in New York.

Transport infrastructure was not the only public construction that stagnated in St. Louis. A comparison of the St. Louis and Kansas City municipal administrations during the 1890s reveals that Kansas City instituted several major administrative reforms during this period, while St. Louis was incapable of raising taxes and instituting urban planning to provide social services because of the polarization between the local business elite and the immigrant population that composed the bulk of the working-class population (Muraskin 1969). The city was divided by intergroup distrust and neighborhood parochialism. Indeed, the city earned a reputation in the late 19th century for being "slow-going and over-cautious" and "one of the most unkempt and unprogressive cities in the United States" (Rammelkamp 1963:335). This tradition of public-sector conservatism continues today. St. Louis had one of the lowest public debts of any urban center at the height of the nationwide urban fiscal crisis in the 1970s.

Slavery and the Southern Ideological Influence

Although historians critical of Belcher's thesis are right in pointing to the structural advantages of Chicago over St. Louis (i.e., lakefront town tied to eastern

capital rather than to southern trade), this does not necessarily diminish the ideological dimension of St. Louis's commercial relationship to the Deep South. Visitor accounts throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries refer to the "southern character" of the city (see *St. Louis Social Notes* 1952). *Colliers Magazine* even ran an article in 1914 (August 22) entitled "Somnolent St. Louis."

Most important for the theme of this article, St. Louis's loss of economic supremacy to Chicago and its long-term relative decline on a national level are directly a function of the city's special relationship to the Deep South and to slavery. Despite the fact that slavery was not the determinant of St. Louis's economic success, the city increasingly modeled itself ideologically on the Deep South (see Hunter 1974). Historians note that the planter elite from the Boonslick counties and along the southern Mississippi River, rather than St. Louis-based industrialists, dominated the Democratic party and controlled the political process in the state of Missouri as a whole. This southern-style planter political control set the tone for high society even in the city. The urban elite, consequently, modeled itself self-consciously on its southern roots (Shalhope 1970:274). Even the wealthy families descended from the original French settlers were convinced that they were members of a separate, unique society and struggled tooth and nail to maintain slavery and to construct a Deep South plantation-style color line in the city.

Oddly, at the time of the Civil War there were only 1,500 slaves left in St. Louis (owned by 497 whites) compared to 1,755 free blacks (Day and Kedro 1974:117). Slaves represented less than one percent of St. Louis's population. According to Missouri historian Primm (1981:186), "Slavery was an encumbrance; and despite local hostility to anti-slavery rhetoric, St. Louis was getting rid of it, by attrition rather than by design." Nevertheless, St. Louis remained a busy slave market for other states through the 1850s, and slave auctions took place in front of the courthouse (Primm 1981:187).

St. Louis's unbalanced and explosive relationship to slavery is also well illustrated by the fact that the emergence of Missouri as a state prompted the Clay compromise. St. Louis's awkward structural location as a "western" slave state on the border of the free states precipitated the nation into its bitterest public debate on race and human rights. Missouri was the first western (as opposed to southern) territory to seek statehood and it did so as a slave territory (Woolsey 1983). It was admitted to the Union through the same negotiated process as Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi: "Such company entitled—or destined—Missouri to have some identity with the 'Lower South'" (Hunter 1980). At the same time, Missouri was surrounded on three sides by free states and territories (Kansas, Illinois, and Iowa): "Missouri's geographical location must have caused its slaveowners many sleepless nights" (Hunter 1980). Indeed, this may help to explain why the new state's constitution in 1821 was aggressively negro-phobic. The St. Louis slave codes were based on those of Virginia. The constitution of the state declared its support for "laws as may be necessary to prevent free negroes and mulattoes from coming to, and settling in this state, under any pretext whatsoever" (cited in Bellamy 1972:198). The leading newspaper in St. Louis hailed this constitution as "immortal" (*St. Louis Enquirer*, September 1, 1821, cited in Bellamy 1972:199).

It was precisely the marginality of slavery, and even the institution's inconsistency with the St. Louis economy as a commercial center that further charged race relations (see Hunter 1974). The presence in St. Louis of the highest proportion of free blacks living in any slave city, the widespread practice of hiring out urban slaves (which weakened the institution of slavery), and the proximity of the free soil of Illinois just across the Mississippi River in East St. Louis probably explain the defensive polarization of St. Louis race relations in the years leading up to the Civil War (see Hunter 1974).

Beginning in the mid-1800s a conservative reaction to abolitionist pressures resulted in a slew of new laws further repressing blacks. Hence the state's adoption of the Jackson resolution in 1849:

Missouri [will] . . . cooperate with the slave-holding states in such measures as they may deem necessary for mutual protection against the encroachments of Northern fanaticism. [paraphrased in Bush 1951]

In 1835 free blacks were forbidden to meet in groups of more than five, and an 1847 law required that a county official be present at all black church services (Bellamy 1972:209, 222). Street patrols were instituted to enforce the repressive ordinances (Christensen 1972:6). The hysterical content of Missouri's negrophobia is encapsulated in an 1835 anti-miscegenation law which declared that any black marrying a white was to be "subject to castration by a skilled person at the state's expense" (Bellamy 1972:219). In 1847 it was made illegal to teach a black to read and write and a second law was passed forbidding free blacks from entering the state. St. Louis County courts obliged free blacks between the ages of 7 and 21 to be assigned as apprentices or servants to whites (Christensen 1972:205). Manumission was also discouraged by law. In 1859 a law that would have made all free blacks between the ages of 18 and 50 become slaves again was just barely vetoed by the governor (Bellamy 1973:206). There was a large enough majority in the state senate to overrule the governor's veto and he was forced to resort to a pocket veto to keep the law from being passed.

A Kentucky newspaper in 1858 described St. Louis race relations as "extreme[ly] southern" and noted the dramatic physical separation of blacks and whites (Bellamy 1972:213). Free blacks had to register themselves with the city and carry their "licenses" at all times. Blacks were not allowed to use the ferries crossing the Mississippi without their freeman's licenses or written permission from their masters. The city was the site of several exceptionally violent black/white confrontations during these decades. In 1835 an irate mob burned a mulatto sailor who had killed a policeman in a confrontation on the banks of the Mississippi. Elijah Lovejoy, the editor of a local newspaper that criticized this mob murder, was run out of town after having had his printing presses dumped in the Mississippi River on three separate occasions. Lovejoy established himself just across the river in Alton, Illinois, where he was eventually lynched by a pro-slavery mob (Christensen 1972:20; Troen and Holt 1977:76-80).

White Immigrants Prior to the Civil War

The peculiar polarization of race relations in St. Louis was again revealed in the 1850s when wealthy whites replaced their black servants with impoverished

white immigrants—Irish and German—who began flooding into the city (Bellamy 1972:214). The large-scale immigration into St. Louis of Irish and Germans from the 1820s through the 1860s marked a potential turning point in race relations. Had the immigration continued, the city might have developed along the lines of the northeastern industrial cities. In 1850 more than half of all St. Louisans were immigrants, making it the most foreign-born city in the United States (Sullivan 1976:65). The single largest group of immigrants was composed of Germans, who outnumbered the native Missourians residing in St. Louis by 22,517 to 20,321 in 1850 (Sullivan 1976:65). Many of these Germans were fleeing the political tumult of the 1848 revolution and were politically radical. The second biggest immigrant group were the Irish who were fleeing the potato famine of the late 1840s and who settled in a marginalized shantytown on the outskirts of the city known as “Kerry Patch” (Sullivan 1976:65).

Large-scale immigration was not well received by native-born St. Louisans. In 1852, 1853, and 1854 there were bloody anti-foreigner riots (Sullivan 1976:173). During the 1854 riot an anti-Irish mob rampaged through the Irish slums for two days, killing 10 people and seriously injuring 20. Irish saloons and coffeehouses were demolished and entire blocks of Irish-occupied tenements were burned (Sullivan 1976:175). A branch of the “Know-Nothing Society” was organized in 1854 and made inroads in city government on an anti-foreigner plank (Sullivan 1976:171). Characteristically, the city failed to respond vigorously to these riots and was slow to organize a professional police force to keep order. In fact, one historian has noted that St. Louis was subject to the “grip of mobbism on [its] election process” in the decade prior to the Civil War (Schneider 1974:184). Significantly, while St. Louis was in the throes of inner strife and turmoil, Chicago was busy expanding economically.

The Civil War

The German immigrant vote was crucial in keeping the state of Missouri on the side of the Union during the Civil War. In fact, those who favored slavery and secession to the Confederacy blamed the state’s “desertion of the southern cause” to the presence of the “Dutch” immigrants. Germans were disproportionately represented among the troops raised by the state of Missouri for the Union (Hess 1981). In the countryside, marauding bands of Confederate guerrillas systematically picked out German settlements and ruthlessly slaughtered civilians because of the German reputation as abolitionists (Frizzell 1977).

The confusing whirlwind of political maneuvering and violence enveloping Missouri’s slave-state status on the Union side during the Civil War illustrates well how its structural north/west/south border location gives it a capacity to polarize national debates around race in an exceptional manner. Bitter pro-southerners and fervent abolitionists lived side by side in St. Louis; popular sentiment repeatedly swung in a matter of weeks from one side to the other. St. Louis played the pivotal role in the tug-of-war between pro-southerners and Unionists because the countryside of Missouri was more consistently pro-Confederate. At the time of the Civil War, most of the whites in Missouri who were not born in the state had originated in slave states: 273,808 slaves versus 153,894 from free-soil states, and 160,541 immigrants from Germany (Trexler 1914:9).

Missouri's allegiance to the Union side during the Civil War prompted President Lincoln to rescind the abolitionist General John Fremont's order to free the slaves in the state. In order to keep this strategic border slave state in the Union, Lincoln publicly disavowed any intent to emancipate blacks: "If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it" (cited in Hunter 1980). Slaves in Missouri were freed a full 11 months after those in the Deep South—among the last in the nation—because the Emancipation Proclamation only applied to blacks residing in the Confederate states (Corbett 1983:20; Lee 1951).

Historical documentation about popular sentiment on the eve of the war is contradictory. In August 1860 the state elected Clairborn Jackson, a conservative pro-southerner, to the position of governor. The governor's inaugural address was "a bitter secession appeal under a thin veil of professed love for the Union" (Kirkpatrick 1961a:102). Jackson declared that Missouri's "honor, her interests, and her sympathies point alike in one direction, and determine her to stand by the South" (cited in Kirkpatrick 1961a:102). Only six months later, however, the same Missouri electorate overwhelmingly voted in favor of pro-Union delegates for the state convention in February 1861. This state convention voted to keep Missouri on the side of the Union. Historians account for the confusing outcome of the pro-Union state convention election on the grounds that pro-Confederate Missourians thought that by voting for Unionist delegates they were promoting the possibility of a peaceful solution without having to sacrifice slavery. Even in St. Louis, the state's stronghold of unionist sentiment, political positions on secession were schizophrenic. Constitutional Unionists won the February 28, 1861, election by 15,000 votes but only two months later, after the outbreak of hostilities, pro-Unionists lost the municipal elections by 2,600 votes (Kirkpatrick 1961a:108). By then, however, it was too late. Missouri was formally a member of the Union. In the words of an observer at the turn of the century: "The majority of the citizens [of St. Louis] favored the Confederacy, and only after strenuous efforts was the city held by Federal forces. Even today a large proportion of the inhabitants are descended from friends of the old south" (Mangold 1917:35).

The contradiction of being a pro-South slave state within the Union revealed itself even before the serious fighting of the Civil War began. On April 15, 1861, when President Lincoln ordered Missouri to furnish 75,000 state militia troops to fight the seceded states, Governor Jackson refused categorically, replying to Lincoln:

Your requisition in my judgement, is illegal, unconstitutional and revolutionary in its object, inhuman and diabolical, and cannot be complied with. Not one man will the state of Missouri furnish to carry on such an unholy crusade. [Kirkpatrick 1961b:235]

In defiance of Governor Jackson, pro-abolitionists in St. Louis raised a Unionist militia of 10,591 men with German immigrants heavily overrepresented (Kirkpatrick 1961b:238). Meanwhile, Jackson raised a "state Guard" and declared himself ready to resist the Federal government in a stance of "armed neutrality." On August 5, 1861, he formally declared Missouri's independence from the Federal government, but his forces were immediately defeated at the battle of Boonville and he went into hiding, thereby becoming the head of a fugitive govern-

ment-in-exile (Kirkpatrick 1951:124). The state Convention subsequently declared him to be an outlaw and Missouri awkwardly remained in the Union by default.

By the end of the war, 109,000 Missourians had fought in the Union army and another 30,000 had fought in the Confederate army (Greene, Kremer, and Holland 1980:62). Both the Union and the Confederacy formally appropriated funds for Missouri armies. The fighting was bitter in the countryside, where the majority of the native-born population—especially those who had immigrated to Missouri from the slave states—avidly supported the South and spontaneously formed guerrilla volunteer groups that preyed on defenseless civilians (Shalhope 1970:274). These rural Missourians became particularly desperate and violent toward the end of the war. The leader of one guerrilla band predicted that, if the Union won,

Missourians of "Southern birth and blood," forming a "distinct and superior class," would be shut out by their conquerors from all political privileges. They would be oppressed and impoverished by their "greedy masters" and the fate of the Irish and the Poles will be theirs. [Shalhope 1970:278, emphasis added]

From an economic perspective the Civil War was disastrous for St. Louis and further fueled Chicago's ascendancy. Because of its location on the border with the Confederacy along the central inland economic artery of the southern states (the Mississippi River), the state of Missouri was hard hit by violent guerrilla bands. St. Louis's hinterlands consequently became an unstable cauldron of fighting and massacres and the city was shunned by war profiteers who preferred the relative safety of Chicago.

At the same time, St. Louis's strategic location made it the recipient of heavy flows of refugees. Forty thousand whites and 10,000 fleeing blacks passed through the city (Christensen 1972:5). Consistent with its negrophobic tradition the city government failed to take any emergency measures to accommodate the inflow of blacks. In contrast, the mayor of Kansas City set aside special funds for black refugees and most eventually made it to the Kansas border. St. Louisans were especially hostile to blacks during the war. A mob of whites, for example, burned the city's "Freeman's school" in 1863 (Christensen 1984:125).

Reconstruction of the Black/White Dichotomy after the Civil War

The post-Civil War period heralded an influx of both black and white immigrants from the devastated South. By 1870 the black population had risen to 22,000 in a city of 160,700. Of these blacks, 39 percent were recent arrivals from the Deep South (Christensen 1972:55). Two decades later the size of the urban black community in St. Louis was surpassed in absolute number only by those in New York and Baltimore (Schoenberg and Bailey 1976:94). The proportion of urban blacks in the state (67 percent) was three times higher than the national average (Greene, Kremer, and Holland 1980:100). At the same time, the state as a whole had the lowest black/white ratio of any former slave state in the United States except West Virginia; Missouri was 10 percent black in 1860 and only 4.8 percent in 1910 (Greene, Kremer, and Holland 1980:100).

Nearly all of these blacks were, of course, extremely poor. A 1912 survey found that "the professional class made up less than one-tenth of a percent of the [black] occupational force" (Schoenberg and Bailey 1976:95). At this point blacks were not confined to residential ghettos. Rather, they were concentrated in pocket settlements of wooden houses in the back alleys behind brick tenements that were occupied by Irish and southern European immigrants. The following description of an Italian neighborhood, which had originally been German, then Irish, then Jewish until finally becoming Italian, illustrates the difficult living conditions in the 1910s:

Most of the tenements are two and three story brick buildings backing on a "yard" which is entered by a long, narrow passageway. In between many of these buildings are wedged rickety old wooden houses, which often list sadly, have sunken roofs, and paperstuffed windows. Many are occupied by Negroes, who seem to have clung tenaciously to their miserable quarters throughout the changing tide of neighbors. Their presence stamps the adjacent property as undesirable, and the landlord becomes neglectful. [Crawford 1916:20]

As late as 1920 there were still no all-black wards in the city (Christensen 1972:96).

In St. Louis blacks were excluded from mainstream society immediately following the Civil War. As was noted earlier, Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation did not apply to Missouri slaves. The Missouri Constitutional Convention that followed the Civil War denied blacks the right to vote. It was not until the 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was passed in 1870 that black Missourians were able to participate in the electoral process (Christensen 1984:130–131). Blacks were forbidden to teach in black schools until 1877. An 1889 Missouri law against mixed public schools was upheld in the U.S. Supreme Court, becoming the basis for *Plessy vs. Ferguson*. This law was not revoked until the *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling in 1954. During this period, the city hospital was segregated, as were the cemetery and most of the city's recreation centers. Frederick Douglass was refused a room in the Planters House Hotel (Christensen 1972:196). Washington University stopped admitting blacks in the 1890s and the alumni association of the university's Manual Training School rewrote its constitution to prohibit those blacks who had previously graduated from being able to attend the annual alumni banquet (Christensen 1972:198).

Inconsistencies in the Jim Crow legislation of St. Louis illustrate well, however, the peculiar nature of the polarization of ethnic relations in this border state. For example, public cars were desegregated around the turn of the century, but an observer noted in the 1920s that whites on the trolley cars preferred to stand up rather than sit next to blacks (Christensen 1972:194). St. Louis's cultural apogee was the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exhibition (referred to as the St. Louis World's Fair) attracting 19.7 million visitors. It is a good example of the contradiction between world-class urban pretensions and the reality of a provincially oriented racist society. The authorities of the World's Fair could not decide whether or not the pavilions and refreshment stands should be segregated. Nevertheless, they informed outsiders that the event was integrated. At the same time, the fair organizers requested the black soldiers of the racially integrated Illinois state militia to set up their tents separately from their white comrades-in-arms so as

not to offend the local population. St. Louis-based concessionaire stands also spontaneously refused service to black patrons. The organizers attempted to save face by hastily organizing an "Afro-American pavilion" once the fair had begun, but the director of this pavilion, a Washington, D.C.-based black woman, rescinded the project when she arrived and discovered the extent of ethnic discrimination prevalent on the fairgrounds (see Christensen 1972:200).

During the first half of the 20th century, social critics were unanimous in bemoaning the racially polarizing influence of the southern orientation of the city:

St. Louis is a melting-pot of different character from most large cities. It is a meeting place of the North and the South. The Americans who first came to the city were largely former residents of Southern states and brought with them Southern customs and ideals. . . . The nature of the local negro problem is greatly influenced by Southern thought and tradition, while the attitude on other questions is similarly affected. [Mangold 1917:35]

Between 1889 and 1918 there were 81 lynchings in Missouri, more than in North Carolina and in Virginia (Greene, Kremer, and Holland 1980:96).

Black historian Lorenzo Greene provides a poignant personal portrayal of "the Negro problem" as seen in 1933 by a black New Yorker facing Jim Crow for the first time. A white taxi driver refused him service upon his arrival at a train station in a Missouri university town. He was told to "Get that 'nigger' cab over there." Later that same evening he was reduced to eating take-out ice cream in a dorm room at the all-black Lincoln University after being refused service at two restaurants adjacent to campus:

"A hamburger and a vanilla malted milk," I said. "I'm sorry," he replied, "but we don't serve colored here." I felt both angry and embarrassed, particularly since several white customers were intently watching me with smirks on their faces. . . .

As I ate the ice cream in my dorm room, I looked out of the window. I was unaccustomed to the treatment I had just received. My hunger had left me. I was hurt and sad. All I could do was cry. Disillusioned and dejected, I decided that upon receiving my first paycheck, I would return to New York. [Greene, Kremer, and Holland 1980:2]

Non-Black Immigration and Economic Mediocrity

Blacks were not the only ethnic group who entered St. Louis in large numbers in the four decades following the Civil War. At the turn of the century the city contained 7,549 Italians, 12,119 Russians, 8,759 Hungarians, and 5,959 Poles. None of these groups, however, represented more than 2.5 percent of the total population of the city (Sullivan 1976:68). The numbers of foreigners reaching St. Louis in the 1890–1920 period was considerably smaller than the numbers entering comparable midwestern industrial cities (Chicago, Detroit, Cincinnati) because of the relative weakness of St. Louis's economy.

As we have seen, St. Louis's exposed geographic location and its schizophrenic political sympathies resulted in tremendous economic dislocation and destruction during the Civil War. This was not remedied during the Reconstruc-

tion period. While leaving Chicago unfettered, northern administrators purposefully placed excessively high taxes and severe bureaucratic hurdles on all trade with the southern states that originated in St. Louis. Once again St. Louis's organic ties to the Deep South and its ideological affinity to southern values were crucial factors in crippling the long-term development of its economy. St. Louis and the entire state of Missouri were viewed with distrust and received a least-favored-ally status after the Civil War.

This economic situation did not improve with time:

The decade of the 1890s—a pivotal period during the early stages of immigrant dispersion—was hard on St. Louis. The depression devastated the city's industrial base, which increased only 2 percent during that period. While St. Louis's economy remained highly diversified, it lacked the dynamic quality of Chicago, Detroit, and Cleveland, which generated and refined new economies of scale in petroleum, automobiles, meat processing, and steel. [Mormino 1986:17]

St. Louis had been the American city with the highest proportion of foreign-born inhabitants in 1850. The city's population as a whole had risen dramatically to 160,773 in 1850 from 5,852 in 1830 (Sullivan 1976:65). By 1910, however, when it had 687,029 residents and was still the fourth-largest city in the nation it ranked only thirtieth relative to other large cities in the country in its percentage (18.3) of foreign-born residents (Mormino 1986:17–18). Of all cities in the United States with populations of more than half a million, only Baltimore had fewer immigrants (Mormino 1986:18). Wages in St. Louis were lower than in most other industrialized centers, as the St. Louis Industrial Club bragged in the early 1930s:

Ordinary skilled and semi-skilled factory mechanics are not paid as high an hourly rate generally as is paid in other large centers north and east of here. . . . Starting rates for beginners, both male and female, are likewise lower than in other large industrial centers. [cited in Troen and Holt 1977:146–147]

Amid the industrialists' self-congratulation for the low wages paid to their employees, the city's economy continued to deteriorate relative to the rest of the country. "Between 1929 and 1939 St. Louis's share of the United States' manufacturing output dropped from 2.18 percent to 1.91 percent" (Mormino 1986:102). St. Louis's economy and society no longer had the dynamism of its former 1820–60 heyday and, therefore, could no longer attract foreign immigrants in large numbers.

Despite its relative economic mediocrity, blacks from the South continued to enter the city in large numbers. By 1920 there were 69,854 blacks in St. Louis, representing 9 percent of the total population, compared to 4.1 percent blacks in Chicago, 0.5 percent in Milwaukee, and 4.3 percent in Cleveland (Mormino 1986:19). As has been noted, the percentage of urbanized blacks in Missouri at this time was three times the national average. Meanwhile, in the 1920 census St. Louis dropped to become the sixth-largest city in the nation precisely for its failure to attract foreign immigrants (Mormino 1986:18).

Consolidation of Black versus White

The disproportionate black urban presence in a context of relative economic austerity resulted in especially charged race relations. In 1917 East St. Louis was

host to the nation's bloodiest race riot. The roots of the riot lay in a highly charged labor market in which white laborers of both foreign origin and native rural birth were attempting to organize unions to raise their wages, which were 17 cents per hour, half the prevailing rate in other industrialized regions. Employers began flooding local markets with southern black immigrants and a white mob stampeded through black neighborhoods, killing in their path. The death toll rose to 39 blacks and 9 whites (Rudwick 1964).

St. Louis's foreign immigrants and their descendants were drawn into this racial polarization. Even the formerly staunchly abolitionist and politically radical Germans succumbed to negrophobia (Primm 1981:436). Today the southern section of St. Louis (where the descendants of German immigrants are located in large numbers) has the reputation of being the most anti-black neighborhood of the city (see Cervantes 1974:8-9). The earliest dramatic indication of the conversion of immigrants to southern-style anti-black sentiment is provided by the residential segregation ordinance of 1916, which was passed by popular vote 52,220 to 17,877. The Polish-American association was a staunch supporter of the racist law and even the Catholic church was loath to condemn it and did not issue a statement until it was too late to influence the election (Primm 1981:438). The United Welfare Association, an influential neighborhood "improvement" association was especially hysterical in its anti-black exhortations: "Negro invasion [is] . . . a danger . . . greater even than fire, or flood, or tornado—far greater" (cited in Kelleher 1970:239-240).

It was the economic mediocrity of St. Louis that contributed to reaffirming ethnic definitions along the Deep South's white/black racial dichotomy. There was not a sufficient concentration of foreign immigrants to redefine ethnic tensions along the more diverse lines found in Chicago or the industrial Northeast: "The historic failure of St. Louis to attract large numbers of southern and eastern European immigrants accentuated the city's black-white dichotomy" (Mormino 1986:239). Deteriorating race relations were exacerbated after World War II by the large-scale immigration of impoverished rural whites, derogatorily referred to as "hoosiers" (Wolfe et al. 1968; Rynearson and Bourgois 1987). These impoverished whites were particularly intolerant of blacks, and large segregated neighborhoods of poor whites emerged in the 1940s and 1950s. The poorest census tract of St. Louis during the 1960s was a white "hoosier" neighborhood (Wolfe et al. 1968).

Following World War II, consequently, St. Louis developed as one of the poorest cities in the country, leading the nation in substandard housing (Mormino 1986:114). "Only Houston and Atlanta, where the poor and near-poor families comprised 17.8 percent and 16.3 percent of the total families, had a greater proportion of economically disadvantaged than St. Louis (15.3 percent)" (Dubman 1973:24). Most important, however, the city had the highest percentage (31.4) of blacks living below the poverty line of any other large city in the United States in 1970 (Dubman 1973:27). As of the 1980 census less than 50 percent of all the adults in St. Louis had finished high school (Jackson 1987:634).

Unlike the Deep South, where racial polarization is often accompanied by residential contiguity, St. Louis has evolved a northern-style residential pattern of physical segregation but has developed it to its southern (and western) ideological extreme. In 1980 the city registered one of the highest residential seg-

regation indexes in the country (95.1) with the index dropping only to 88.0 when the suburbs were included (Farley 1983:332). Furthermore, a closer look at the less-segregated suburbs revealed that many were in a transitional phase of racial turnover (i.e., white flight) following the recent arrival of blacks. Several other suburbs had already become almost 100 percent black: "It is concluded that patterns of segregation which have historically existed in the central city are now being repeated in the suburbs" (Farley 1983:347; see also Farley 1984, Frank 1988, Little, Nourse, and Phaires 1975).

St. Louis's dramatic patterns of residential and social segregation began to coagulate in the 1920s. The Supreme Court struck down the legality of the 1916 residential segregation ordinances, and St. Louis responded by developing an institution even more restrictive than the housing covenants that existed all through the United States. St. Louis invented the phenomenon of the "private street," designed to promote class and ethnic homogeneity. In return for building and maintaining their access way, residents on private streets can keep "undesirable trespassers" from approaching their homes. They even prevent the cars of outsiders from circulating in their community by building locked gates across the entrance to the street which only residents have keys to. Ironically many St. Louis intellectuals are proud of the fact that their city has developed a network of these segregated private streets unparalleled in any other urban center in the country (cf. Savage 1987; St. Louis Post-Dispatch 1987).

In addition to the private street, there is a proliferation of public streets that have been blocked by the city to prevent through traffic. The alleged purpose of these blockades is to make the streets quieter and safer for children to play in. Critics sensitive to the city's ethnic polarization claim that access routes from black neighborhoods into white neighborhoods are blocked more consistently than white routes into black communities (Faith Sandler, personal communication, 1988). Through the mid-1960s the real estate section of the city's "liberal" newspaper still ran advertisements that specified "For Sale Black" and "For Sale White" (see Frank 1988). However, it was a lawsuit originating in St. Louis that finally brought the Supreme Court to rule against restrictive deed covenants in 1948.

White Flight and Inner-City Decay

Political economists have noted that urban centers throughout the United States have suffered due to the structural transformations of the U.S. economy in the 1950s (Tabb and Sawers 1984). Factories have left crowded urban centers in search of cheaper rent and non-unionized work forces in the suburbs, rural areas, or overseas. Cities have, consequently, gone through a dislocating transition from industrial centers to corporate finance headquarters. This process has been particularly dramatic in the heavy industrial cities of the Midwest, which have been especially prone to overseas competition. For example, after Detroit, St. Louis is the second-largest automobile producer in the nation. Furthermore, since the 1960s it has been extremely dependent on military contracts to maintain its industrial jobs; it is second only to Los Angeles in receiving public monies. In this context, between 1960 and 1980, St. Louis led the nation in its loss of manufacturing jobs. Even when one factors in the moderate gain in manufac-

turing jobs that occurred in the suburbs between 1970 and 1980 the total loss for the St. Louis statistical metropolitan area was still 14 percent (St. Louis County 1982:29). As has been documented by numerous analysts, this structural dislocation hits the black inner city especially hard (Bonacich 1976). In 1966 North St. Louis (where 90 percent of the city's black population lives today) had the highest unemployment rate of any urban neighborhood in the country—39 percent compared to central Harlem's 29 percent (Piven and Cloward 1971:216).

St. Louis's structural economic crisis deepened further in the early 1970s:

The entire metropolitan area is one of the slowest growing areas in the nation. A single industry—aircraft—accounted for over 40 percent of the total growth in manufacturing jobs . . . in the decade 1958–1968. . . . Furthermore, one firm—McDonnell Douglas—accounts for virtually all of the employment generated by the aircraft industry. To compound the matter, generally one product has accounted for most of the local employment of that firm in recent years, the F-4 fighter aircraft. [Leven 1972:xi–xii]

All the urban centers in the United States suffered fiscally in the 1970s as their industrial base and middle-class residents moved to the suburbs in increasing numbers (Hill 1984; Tabb 1984). St. Louis's tax base has suffered severely because its perimeter has not been redrawn since 1876 and the surrounding counties adamantly refuse annexation. The suburban flight/fiscal crisis phenomenon also began earlier in St. Louis than in other urban areas. In 1936 a retrospective analysis of the city's past 25 years of economic development by the Planning Commission stated almost prophetically:

Population is moving out of the city. Land values have declined markedly in the central areas of the old city. Buildings are being demolished to save taxes, and little or no replacement occurs. . . . If adequate measures are not taken, the city is faced with gradual economic and social collapse. The older central areas of the city are being abandoned, and this insidious trend will continue until the entire city is engulfed. [cited in Leven 1972:13]

The "adequate measures" called for obviously were not taken. A half-century later the city continues to have the nation's highest rate of housing abandonment, with 25 percent of the housing stock being lost between 1960 and 1980.

The massive decay of St. Louis has introduced a dramatic ring to otherwise dry economic studies:

In the last two decades, [St. Louis] provides a textbook case of urban dispersal, of the shift from central-city concentration to a regional metropolis characterized by low density; but it is exemplary for the extreme and disorderly nature of this shift, for exhibiting processes of change somehow magnified and accelerated beyond control to produce urban blight of devastating extent and severity. [Leven 1972:1]

Economists have even acknowledged that ideological factors—the southern color line—exacerbated this process of white, middle-class flight and concomitant blight: "segregated housing—overt until 1964, covert since then—has been . . . an important contributing factor in the conditions we are analyzing" (Leven

1972:3; see also Little, Nourse, and Phaires 1975). Uncharacteristically, economists have allowed adjectives to embellish their statistical portraits: "Net out-migration . . . was a staggering 392,315–208,742 between 1950 and 1960, and 183,573 in the following decade" (Leven 1972:15). "No major American city approached the proportion of St. Louis's total population loss in the decade just ended" (Leven 1972:18). Most important is the ethnic composition of these statistics: "Over 99 percent of the out-migrating population has been white [1950–1960]" (Leven 1972:18). In the wake of this economic chaos, 50,000 blacks from the Deep South immigrated during the 1960s (Cervantes 1974:4). The rising numbers of blacks fueled an even greater middle-class hysteria as whites proved willing to accept staggering economic losses on their houses in exchange for the racial segregation available in St. Louis's dispersed suburbs. The city went from being 18 percent black in 1950 to almost 50 percent black by 1980. The economic decline of the increasingly black inner-city neighborhoods has been further exacerbated by the flight of the black middle class, which paralleled the behavior of its white counterpart as soon as the Supreme Court legislated fair housing laws in 1948 (Schoenberg and Bailey 1976).

Despite their growing numerical strength, black St. Louisans have only minimal political clout in the city (Jackson 1987:634). There has never been a black mayor of St. Louis and there is no black representation on the city's Board of Estimates and Apportionment in the city. In fact, of all the powerful positions within city politics, only the position of comptroller has ever been held by a black (Jackson 1987:634; see also Dreer 1955). The city's school board is three-quarters white, while the student body of the public school system is three-quarters black.

The demobilization of the black population has been linked by some critics to the prevailing southern atmosphere: "One must recognize that militancy has never been strong in St. Louis. The St. Louis Negro is Southern in style—polite, acquiescent, and, until recently knew his place" (Doyle 1969:91). In this vein, it is more common for young white men to be called "sir" in casual conversation by elderly black men than the reverse.

The exceptional level of segregation and deterioration in the St. Louis public school system since the Supreme Court-mandated desegregation in 1954 provides a tangible expression of black political impotence in the face of white flight to the suburbs. In 1954, white children represented more than two-thirds of all public school students; by 1960 they constituted less than 45 percent; in 1970 just over one-third; and in 1987 less than one-quarter (St. Louis Post-Dispatch 1988b:12A). Of the city's 116 public schools, 60 are all-black. More important, the academic quality of these segregated inner-city schools has been allowed to deteriorate. For example, in 1988, 76 percent of St. Louis students tested below the national norm for reading ability and 56 percent fell below the 30th percentile (Faith Sandler, personal communication, 1988). Observers contend that court-ordered desegregation has not been effective in improving the quality of education received by black inner-city schoolchildren primarily because of a lack of political will on the part of city and state politicians and the school board. The current governor of the state of Missouri ran on an anti-school-busing platform. In the 1987 school board elections, four candidates ran on a white-rights platform from the Southside Citizen's Council and three of those candidates won

(*The Economist* 1987). Each year the school board, dominated by conservative whites, returns unspent millions of dollars of funds from the state that had been earmarked for black schools on a city/state cost-share basis (*St. Louis Post-Dispatch* 1988b:12A).

The Power of Ideology: Self-Destructive Racism

The statistics on black/white segregation do not fully reflect the extent of social segregation in St. Louis. Several northeastern cities can approximate St. Louis's index of dissimilarity, its poverty rate, its degree of white flight, and its level of public school segregation. The difference in St. Louis's case is that the western-style low-density ecology of the city is devoid of effective public transportation, making possible an even greater degree of physical separation between blacks and whites. St. Louisans are obliged to mobilize themselves in private cars and it is possible even for working-class whites to live, work, and socialize without ever coming into physical contact with blacks.

Never having physical contact with a hostile "other" makes the process of generating charged belief systems—ideologies—around ethnicity even more creative than it usually is. Given the polarized history of black/white relations and given the political-economic logic for discrimination from the period of Indian conquest to the present, St. Louis can be understood as a "pressure-cooker" setting for generating racism against blacks. These racist relations not only translate into real power relations of extreme domination and marginalization but have also affected the long-term patterns of economic development of the city. While St. Louis's black/white relations derive in large part from the Deep South, they have historically taken on a peculiarly violent and brutal form in St. Louis precisely because of the region's contradictory influences of the far West and the Northeast clashing with those of the Mississippi River valley. It is no accident that Frederick Douglass went to court in St. Louis, or that the Civil War endured its bloodiest internecine guerrilla massacres of civilians in the hinterlands of St. Louis, or that the race riot with the highest death toll of the century took place in East St. Louis. Most interesting in the contemporary configuration of ethnic relations is the fact that St. Louis had the highest level of middle-class white flight to the suburbs, the most dramatic spread of urban blight and housing destruction, and the largest percentage loss of manufacturing jobs of any major city during the 1960–80 period. This enables the city to maintain today the highest index of housing segregation of any urban center in the United States.

One of the results of this black/white discontinuum has been to reinforce the melting-pot phenomenon for non-black immigrants. For example, there is no socially recognized category for Hispanics. Not being considered black Americans, Hispanics are able—or rather obliged—to blend into the white Anglo community (Rynewson 1980). Should they fail to assimilate, they run the risk of suffering the same kind of discrimination that is directed against blacks; most opt out of that. Another example of this dynamic is provided by the Japanese who arrived in St. Louis after their release from internment camps in Arkansas during World War II. They were relatively better-received by St. Louisans than they had been in California, their previous residence (Inoue, this issue; Matsunaga 1944). More recently, Laotian refugees have even been welcomed with

open arms by some residents of the whitest recesses of southside St. Louis neighborhoods, which otherwise have fought determinedly to maintain their ethnic segregation (Maxwell, this issue). Of course there is also conflict and confusion over the arrival of these new immigrants, since they compete with great effectiveness for the dwindling number of entry-level manufacturing jobs in the inner city (see articles by White and Rynearson, this issue). A tentative residual ethnic category of "Chinese" or "Vietnamese" is being developed to accommodate newcomers who are obviously neither white nor black. Hence, on a more personal level, shortly after I moved into one of the only mixed-ethnicity neighborhoods in St. Louis in 1986, a nervous white neighbor came to my door to ask discreetly if my wife, who is from Latin America, were Chinese.

Although ultimately the power relations expressed through ethnic categorizations take on their meaning through these kinds of personal interactions, on a deeper theoretical level I hope to have shown how the historical vicissitudes of the black/white dichotomy of St. Louis raise interesting questions about the relative power of ideology and material reality in shaping history. To a large extent the city is a victim of its adherence to Deep South race relations. Had St. Louis in the mid-1800s not been saddled with a Mississippi steamboat oligarchy that was ideologically committed to traditional plantation society, had it not been schizophrenic during the Civil War, had it not had the highest rate of white flight during the 1960–80 decades—then perhaps the city would not have emerged as such a classic urban backwater of the United States in the 1990s.

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