Paris Tramways as Artifacts of Civilization and Barbarism in the Age of Empire, 1890s–1920s

Peter Soppelsa
University of Oklahoma

From the 1890s to 1914, Paris's horse-drawn and motorized tramway networks expanded rapidly. Growth peaked before the 1900 Universal Exposition, when officials approved nineteen new lines to serve Parisians and millions of guests gathered to celebrate the turning century.[1] These tramways inspired two types of protest. Historians have noted NIMBY-like bourgeois efforts to exclude tramways and poorer passengers from wealthy neighborhoods, but they have overlooked popular protest for tramway inclusion.[2] This essay builds on previous historical mobility studies, including Peter Norton's and my own, that analyze the language used in negotiating transportation infrastructure.[3] Protests against the tramways registered in the press in notable categories of epithets:

1 Alain Faure, "Les invasions barbares ou le tramway criminel (Paris, 1872–1914)," *Le mouvement social*, no. 266 (January–March 2019): 87–110, at 88.

2 Alain Faure, "Les invasions barbares"; Gérard Jacquemet, "Voirie, transports et équipements urbain à Belleville de 1860 à 1914," *Paris et Ile-de-France: Mémoires publiés par la Fédération des Sociétés historiques et archéologiques de Paris et de l'Ile-de-France* 33 (1982): 225–253, 249n25.

3 Peter Norton, "Street Rivals: Jaywalking and the Invention of the Motor Age Street," *Technology and Culture* 48 (2007): 331–359, quote 331; Peter Soppelsa, "Reworking Appropriation: The Language of Paris Railways," *Transfers* 4 (2014): 104–123; Anton Rosenthal, "The Streetcar in the Urban Imaginary of Latin America," *Journal of Urban History* 42 (2016): 162–179.

Bulletin of the German Historical Institute 75 (Spring 2025): 13-38

"murderous," "crusher" and "tramway of death," concerning safety; "criminal," "odious," "mutilation," and "vandalism" with respect to aesthetics; and this essay's centerpiece, *tramway des barbares* (barbarians' tramway), reflecting concerns about civilization. The term "vandalism" also evoked Europe's barbarian past. In such debates and protests, to quote Norton, "competing users flung epithets at one another." The article thus takes what Martin Melosi has called the cultural turn in infrastructure studies, working against traditional top-down and institutional approaches by studying how users experienced, represented, and imagined infrastructures.[4]

The vocabulary of civilization and barbarism saturates modern French cultural, political, and imperial history. Alice Conklin called civilization "a particularly French concept; the French invented the term in the eighteenth century and have celebrated the achievements of their own ever since." Alice Bullard added that "savagery and civilization are rhetorical devices used in attempts to enforce a particular social order or political agenda. . . In nineteenth-century France, the ideal of civilization acted as a sort of talisman that kept away the crisis of meaning generated by modernity."[5] As detailed ahead, Paris tramways became charged objects in this crisis. Conklin and Bullard share a focus on how the concept of civilization was mobilized to justify French imperialism and its famous civilizing mission. It is no coincidence that Paris's debates about tramways and civilization occurred as the age of empire crested around 1900.

Since historians have already recognized the social exclusion of Paris's elite tramway protests, this essay pursues three other analytic threads — local, national, and transnational. For local social history, it documents protests from below that demanded tramway access and inclusion, appropriating and reversing charges of "barbarism." For national cultural history, it analyzes "barbarian" rhetoric in the long-term context of France's Roman heritage, and the short-term context of the

4 Martin Melosi, "Urban Infrastructure and the Cultural Turn," in *Concepts of Urban-Environmental History*, ed. Sebastian Haumann, Martin Knoll, and Detlev Mares (Bielefeld, 2020), 145–154; Jonathan Soffer, "Introduction," in *Urban Infrastructure: Historical and Social Dimensions of an Interconnected World*, ed. Joseph Heathcott, Jonathan Soffer, and Rae Zimmerman (Pittsburgh, 2022), 3–8.

5 Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895–1930* (Stanford, CA, 1997), 1; Alice Bullard, *Exile to Paradise: Savagery and Civilization in Paris and the South Pacific* (Stanford, CA, 2000), 2.

1900 exposition and the new imperialism. Finally, this essay situates Paris debates about tramways and civilization transnationally, by reviewing tramway protest studies globally, before showing that foreign journalists around 1900 covered Paris tramways while foreign intellectuals also linked tramways and barbarism throughout this era.

I. Global Studies of Tramway Protest

Histories of public transport have consistently found that shared vehicles were objects of social conflict from the introduction of omnibuses in the 1820s and street railways in the 1830s, both pulled by horses. Before motorization raised new safety, noise, and emissions concerns in the 1880s, group travel caused controversial social mixing on two related levels. First, transit lines joined places of different wealth and status with frequent and rapid connections. Second, vehicles themselves enclosed different classes, races, or genders in spaces of encounter and conflict; to manage these encounters, railways, steamships, and eventually airplanes established separate spaces and prices for different "classes."[6] Using language later applied in Paris and elsewhere, Philadelphia tramway critics in 1858 called horsecars "barbarism" that would "invade, vandalize, and vulgarize" the streets. In 1867, Mark Twain criticized New York's crowded trams for "going back to original barbarism."[7]

During the second industrial revolution (1880s–1920s), motorization, electrification, and the growing mass transit market accelerated tramway conflicts, sometimes violent, in cities worldwide. As Eric Hobsbawm wrote in 1968, "tramways, whether in Calcutta or Barcelona, are usually convenient for rioters; partly because the raising of fares, which tends to affect all the poor simultaneously, is a very natural precipitant of trouble, partly because these large and track-bound vehicles, when burned or overturned, can block streets and disrupt traffic very easily."[8] Since Hobsbawm wrote, a rich

6 Sam Bass Warner, *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston, 1870–1900* (Cambridge, MA, 1978); Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley, CA, 1987), 70–88; Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), 191–193; Masha Belenky, *Engine of Modernity: The Omnibus and Urban Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Manchester, 2019), esp. part 2.

7 Joel Tarr and Clay McShane, *The Horse in the City: Living Machines in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore, 2007), 71; Gregg Camfield, *Sentimental Twain: Samuel Clemens in the Maze of Moral Philosophy* (Philadelphia, 2016), 87.

8 Eric Hobsbawm, *Revolutionaries* (New York, 2001), 262.

scholarly literature has examined urban tramway opposition, protest, sabotage, and violence. This literature shares his global scope.

Social histories of tramway protest foreground race, gender, and class. Studies of race highlight protests for tramway access by marginalized and minoritized people. Geoff Zylstra has shown how Black Philadelphians faced racist violence while struggling to access horse trams in the 1850s–1860s.[9] As a broad literature has documented, transport access remained central to American struggles for racial liberation and civil rights for another century, before the iconic 1955–1956 Montgomery, Alabama, Bus Boycott.[10] Comparable dynamics gripped another segregated city, apartheid Johannesburg.[11] Similarly, studies of gender aboard American, Canadian, German, Turkish, and Japanese tramways have examined debates about women riding trams and the troubling "intimacy" of interacting with male passengers.[12] Finally, labor histories have implicated tramways in class struggles from the Carolinas to Uruguay. From the 1890s to the 1920s, violent tram worker strikes called "car wars" or "trolley wars" touched most major U.S. cities and were mirrored in Mexico City, Havana, Lima, São

9 Geoff D. Zylstra, "Whiteness, Freedom, and Technology: The Racial Struggle over Philadelphia's Streetcars, 1859–1867," *Technology and Culture* 52 (2011): 678–702.

10 Citing only some recent examples: Kenneth W. Goings and Brian D. Page, "African Americans Versus the Memphis Street Railway Company: Or, How to Win the Battle but Lose the War, 1890–1920," *Journal of Urban History* 30 (2004): 131–151; Blair L. M. Kelley, "Right to Ride: African American Citizenship and Protest in the Era of 'Plessy v. Ferguson,'" *African American Review* 41 (2007): 347–356; Robert Cassanello, "Avoiding 'Jim Crow': Negotiating Separate and Equal on Florida's Railroads and Streetcars and the Progressive Era Origins of the Modern Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of Urban History* 34 (2008): 435–457; Jason L. Bates, "Consolidating Support for a Law 'Incapable of Enforcement': Segregation of Tennessee Streetcars, 1900–1930," *Journal of Southern History* 82 (2016): 97–126; Hilary McLaughlin-Stonham, *From Slavery to Civil Rights: On the Streetcars of New Orleans 1830s–Present* (Liverpool, 2018); Elizabeth Belanger, "Working-Class Mobility and Streetcar Politics in Reconstruction-Era St. Louis," *GeoHumanities* 8 (2022): 122–139.

11 G. H. Pirie, "Racial Segregation on Johannesburg Trams: Procedures and Protest, 1904–1927," *African Studies* 48 (1989): 37–54.

12 Donald Davis and Barbara Lorenzkowski, "A Platform for Gender Tensions: Women Working and Riding on Canadian Urban Public Transit in the 1940s," *Canadian Historical Review* 79 (1998): 431–465; Barbara Schmucki, "On the Trams: Women, Men and Urban Public Transport in Germany," *Journal of Transport History* 23 (2002): 60–72; James Ryan, " 'Unveiling' the Tramway: The Intimate Public Sphere in Late Ottoman and Republican Istanbul," *Journal of Urban History* 44 (2018): 811–834; James A. Fujii, "Intimate Alienation: Japanese Urban Rail and the Commodification of Urban Subjects," *differences* 11 (1999): 106–133; Belanger, "Working-Class Mobility."

Paolo, and Valparaiso. Critics of Chicago's 1903 strike called it "barbaric."[13]

Historians of technology have shown that European and North American city dwellers often opposed electric tramways' nuisances and risks, shaping the uneven adoption of electricity and motor vehicles during the second industrial revolution.[14] Electric trams, and particularly their overhead trolley wires, posed two problems: the risk of electrocution and fire, and the threat of wires disrupting architectural aesthetics — especially in major cities (see figure 1). Both problems touched Paris, where trolley wires sparked resistance from elites and conservatives defending the capital as a national architectural showcase. In 1902, one municipal councilor threatened to remove trolley wires installed in his district by hand. Elsewhere, protestors cut down trolley wire poles: crowds led by New York's mayor in the 1880s and by lumberjacks in Toronto in the 1890s.[15] In 1893, the mayor of Montreal suburb Mile End tore up tram tracks.[16] Electric tramway infrastructures — tracks, poles, and wires — were a major source of controversy across the North Atlantic, with similar incidents also occurring in American, Canadian, Belgian, German, and Austro-Hungarian cities.

13 Jeffrey M. Leatherwood, *The Quest for Streetcar Unionism in the Carolina Piedmont, 1919–1922* (Cambridge, UK, 2017); Neil J. Lehto, *The Thirty-Year War: A History of Detroit's Streetcars, 1892–1922* (East Lansing, MI, 2017); Scott Molloy, *Trolley Wars: Streetcar Workers on the Line* (Durham, NH, 2007); Stephen H. Norwood, *Strikebreaking and Intimidation: Mercenaries and Masculinity in Twentieth-Century America* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2002), 35–36 (for Chicago strike); Anton Rosenthal, "Streetcar Workers and the Transformation of Montevideo: The General Strike of May 1911," *The Americas* 51 (1995): 471–494; Anton Rosenthal, "The Streetcar in the Urban Imaginary," 169–170.

14 John McKay, *Tramways and Trolleys: The Rise of Urban Mass Transport in Europe* (Princeton, 1976); Eric Schatzberg, "The Mechanization of Urban Transit in the United States: Electricity and Its Competitors," in *Competitiveness: Contemporary and Historical Perspectives on Electrical, Electronics, and Computer Industries*, ed. William Aspray, 225–242 (Piscataway, NJ, 1993); Eric Schatzberg, "Culture and Technology in the City: Opposition to Mechanized Street Transportation in Late-Nineteenth-Century America," in *Technologies of Power: Essays in Honor of Thomas Parke Hughes and Agatha Chipley Hughes*, ed. Michael Thad Allen and Gabrielle Hecht (Cambridge, MA, 2001), 57–94; John H. White, "War of the Wires: A Curious Chapter in Street Railway History," *Technology and Culture* 46 (2005): 374–384.

15 For New York, see Charles W. Cheape, *Moving the Masses: Urban Public Transit in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, 1880–1912* (Cambridge, MA, 1980), 62; John McKay, *Tramways and Trolleys*, 86 (for Paris), and 87 (for Toronto); see also Peter Soppelsa, "Reworking Appropriation."

16 Christopher G. Boone, "The Politics of Transportation Services in Suburban Montreal: Sorting Out the 'Mile End Muddle,' 1893–1909," *Urban History Review/Revue d'histoire urbaine* 24 (1996): 25–39.

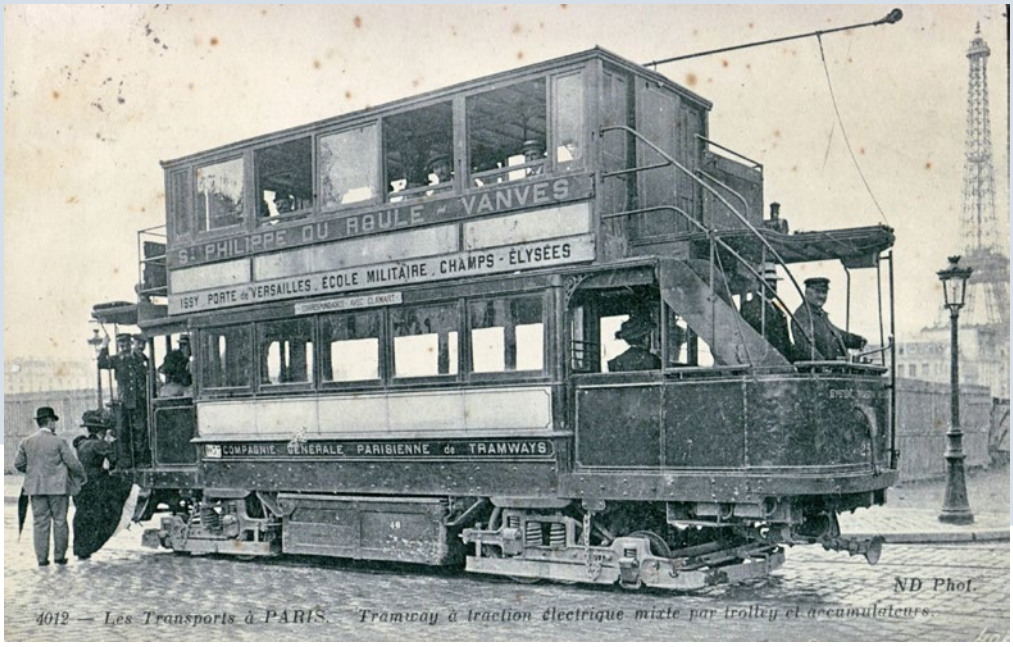

Figure 1. Photographic postcard, c.1900, Neurdein brothers #4012. From the series Transportation in Paris, captioned "Tramway with mixed electric traction by trolley and accumulators." Source: https://soundlandscapes.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/043.jpg

Studies of African, Asian, and Latin American cities implicate electric tramway protests in contests over the meanings of civilization and modernity that characterized this age of accelerating European imperialism. In 1899, Seoul protesters threw rocks and overturned trams as vehicles of Western and Japanese colonial influence. Tokyo passengers violently protested fare increases from 1906 to 1911. Although more peaceful, contemporaries in Cairo, Mexico City, and Montevideo raised similar concerns about electric tramways' dangers, Western influence, and their relevance for negotiating civilization and barbarism. One Montevidean wrote about gruesome tramway accidents, "Progress is something that appears much like barbarism."[17]

Paris historians have also contributed to this research. Arnauld Passalacqua showed that Parisians long treated tramways as "resident aliens," fundamentally foreign (especially American) artifacts that achieved only "reluctant" acceptance even

17 Min Suh Son, "Electrifying Seoul and the Culture of Technology in Nineteenth Century Korea" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2008), 79–130; James A. Fujii, "Networks of Modernity: Rail Transport and Modern Japanese Literature," *Japan Railway and Transport Review*, no. 13 (1997): 12–16, at 13; Anton Rosenthal, "The Arrival of the Electric Streetcar and the Conflict over Progress in Early Twentieth-Century Montevideo," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 27 (1995): 319–341, esp. 329–332, quote on 331; On Barak, *On Time: Technology and Temporality in Modern Egypt* (Berkeley, CA, 2013), chap. 5; Diana Montaño, *Electrifying Mexico: Technology and the Transformation of a Modern City* (Austin, 2021), chap. 3.

after operating for almost a century.[18] Alain Faure recently interpreted the anti-tramway protests of Paris's elite as bids to segregate Paris, limiting access to wealthy western neighborhoods. Highlighting the epithet "barbarians' tramway," he documented in detail the exclusionary aims of elite protest.[19] Passalaqua and Faure examined both organized and spontaneous tramway protest, but they ignored why it was cast in terms of civilization and barbarism, because they did not address Paris's imperial role. Writers outside France also saw tramways as artifacts of civilization or barbarism, a theme which returns ahead. Meanwhile Parisians debated civilization in light of longstanding constructions of their Roman heritage, a repository of lessons about imperialism.

II. The New Rome

Paris's Roman roots run deep. The Roman settlement beneath the Left Bank emerges today in the Cluny Museum baths and the *Arènes de Lutèce* amphitheater. More controversial is Rome's legacy, refigured through centuries of discourse. French national identity is often explained as "Gallo-Roman," forged in the clash between Gauls and Romans. While meaningful, this explanation is neoclassical and nostalgic, excludes France's empire, and complicates its Roman-ness. Yet French leaders from Charles de Valois to Charles de Gaulle claimed to rule a "New Rome," a notion richly documented in a recent conference volume.[20] Although artifacts from bread and wine to Catholicism might justify such claims, Roman engineering has been particularly prominent, both intellectually (an approach to engineering) and infrastructurally (built into the landscape as roads, bridges, and waterworks).

The medieval Valois dynasty pursued a new Rome by rebuilding Paris bridges and wider, straighter roads. Renaissance studies track the notion through the 1500s, documenting French travel to Rome, trade in Roman artifacts, and a legion of textual and visual representations of Rome.[21] Soon the

18 Arnaud Passalacqua, "Resident Alien: France's Ambivalent Relationship to the Tramway Before 1914," in *Mobility in History: Themes in Transport*, T2M Yearbook 2011, ed. Georgine Clarsen et al. (Neuchâtel, 2011), 71–86; Arnaud Passalacqua, "Reluctant Capitals: Transport Mobility and Tramways in London and Paris 1830–1950," *Town Planning Review* 85 (2014): 203–216.

19 Faure, "Les invasions barbares"; Jacquemet, "Voirie, transports et équipement urbain," 249n25.

20 Michèle Lowrie and Barbara Vinken, eds., *Paris, a New Rome* (Berlin, 2024).

21 Margaret McGowan, *The Vision of Rome in Late Renaissance France* (New Haven, CT, 2000); Richard Cooper, *Roman Antiquities in Renaissance France, 1515–65* (Abingdon, UK, 2016).

wars of religion lent the phrase "New Rome" the flavor of the Counterreformation. In the 1600s and 1700s, the absolutist Bourbon dynasty expanded neoclassical public works. Chandra Mukerji's studies of absolutist water engineering — the Versailles gardens and the Canal du Midi — have shown how builders tried to imitate and surpass Rome's celebrated aqueducts, canals, fountains, and sewers.[22]

After the French Revolution, Napoleon I embellished Paris with neo-Roman monuments, including triumphal arches on the Places de l'Étoile and de la Carousel and the Vendôme Column, imitating Trajan's Column.[23] (See figure 2.) Donald Reid showed that later underground projects, such as the catacombs ossuary and sewer modernization, also claimed Roman antecedents. After 1853, Bonapartists Napoleon III and Baron Haussmann explicitly pursued the New Rome through the ambitious and controversial urban rebuilding project known as "Haussmannization," which stretched for decades and included engineer Eugène Belgrand's aqueducts and sewers. As Reid noted, "Even ironic observers of Haussmannization couched their comments in terms of the Roman analogy."[24]

Meanwhile, France braided infrastructure and imperialism to make its empire a new Rome. Alice Conklin has shown how infrastructures of public works and public health were central to France's civilizing mission in West Africa. Diana Davis's history of North African colonization showed how intensified farming, land reclamation, and irrigation sought to "resurrect the Granary of Rome." Sara Pritchard showed how modern French waterworks, both metropolitan and colonial, followed Roman legal and engineering precedents as "officials forged genealogies, not only from Roman hydraulics to their own endeavors but also from the Roman Empire to their own."[25] Thus, for

22 Colin Jones, *Paris: The Biography of a City* (New York, 2004), 104, 127, 130–131, 160, 172; Orest Ranum, *Paris in the Age of Absolutism*, rev. ed. (1968; University Park, PA, 2002), 8–9, 328–373; Chandra Mukerji, *Territorial Ambitions and the Gardens of Versailles* (Cambridge, UK, 1997); Mukerji, *Impossible Engineering: Technology and Territoriality on the Canal du Midi* (Princeton, NJ, 2009).

23 Eleanor Tollfree, "Napoleon and the 'New Rome': Rebuilding Imperial Rome in the Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-century Paris" (Ph.D. diss., University of Bristol, 2000); Diana Rowell, *Paris: The "New Rome" of Napoleon I* (London, 2012).

24 Donald Reid, *Paris Sewers and Sewermen: Realities and Representations* (Cambridge, MA, 1991), 16, 29, 36, 50, quote on 47; Sean Weiss, "Making Engineering Visible: Photography and the Politics of Potable Water in Modern Paris," *Technology and Culture* 61 (2020): 740–771.

25 Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*, chap. 2; Diana Davis, *Resurrecting the Granary of Rome: Environmental History and French Colonial Expansion in North Africa* (Athens, OH, 2007); Sara Pritchard, "From Hydroimperialism to Hydrocapitalism: 'French' Hydraulics in France, North Africa, and Beyond," *Social Studies of Science* 42 (2012): 591–615, 596; see also Sara Pritchard, *Confluence: The Nature of Technology and the Remaking of the Rhône* (Cambridge, MA, 2011), 28–34.

Figure 2. The Arc de Triomphe and the place de l'Etoile. An electric tram and its tracks are visible in the lower right quadrant. Press photograph, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gallica digital library (gallica.bnf.fr), digital ID: btv1b532131082.

centuries French elites promoted infrastructure as embodying the legacy of Roman civilization, although this legacy gained new urgency as France expanded its empire in the late 1800s.

In Paris around 1900, civilizational claims defended Parisians against the perceived suburban threats of crime, disease, poverty, and violence, which were often cast as barbarian, specifically as Native American, like the iconic suburban street thugs called "Apaches." While terms like barbarism, civilization, vandalism, and Roman evoked Europe's own past, Native American imagery allowed French imperial chauvinism, exoticism, and othering to target Paris's suburbs, while drawing attention away from France's empire in Africa and Asia. This imagery, dating at least to Alexandre Dumas's serial novel *Les Mohicans de Paris* (1854–59), also conveyed subtle nostalgia for France' lost colonies in the Americas.[26] Such Native American imagery added ethnic and racial overtones to the otherwise nationalist notion that tramways threatened to "Americanize" France.

Paris's urban geography after the 1860 expansion of the city limits reflects a clear division of space by social class: as the city center gentrified, lost population, and centralized power, the priced-out working classes were increasingly pushed

26 Gérard Jacquemet, "La violence à Belleville au début du XXe siècle," *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire de Paris et de l'Ile-de-France* (1978): 141–167, 141–146 (on the "Apaches"); Jérôme Beauchez, "The Iconic Apache: Early 1900s Paris and the Making of a Criminal Bogeyman," *British Journal of Criminology* 64 (2024): 1405–1427.

into the peripheral districts and the suburbs. The wealthy core of Paris was surrounded by a ring of poverty frequently described as the capital's "margins" or "frontier," and linked with the neglected "Zone" of squatters and shantytowns just outside the city limits and the "red belt" of radicalized left-wing suburbs beyond.[27] This local center-periphery inequality illuminates the epithet "barbarians' tramway." Tramway critics accused progressive politicians of "vandalizing" the streets with tramlines that let savage suburbanites "invade" Paris. Tramway supporters, by contrast, thought it more barbaric to protest social and technological progress. However, given the size, diversity, and ideological specialization of the Paris press in this era, it is crucial to note that the language of civilization and barbarism was widely shared and appropriated for different purposes by authors from different classes and with different political perspectives. Parisians thus debated tramways as assets or threats to civilization by overlaying the capital region's class geography with images of far-flung cultures and continents. How could civilization and modernity coexist in a motorizing city with deep Roman roots? Could tramways share the Roman luster of aqueducts, catacombs, and triumphal arches?

III. Barbarian Tramways

The epithet "barbarians' tramway" emerged in 1897 when the General Omnibus Company (commonly CGO), which operated most Paris horsecars, opened a new horse-drawn line from the southern working-class suburb Montrouge to the church of Saint-Philippe-du-Roule in the wealthy western 8th Arrondissement (district). (See figure 3.) The opening followed months of centrist and right-wing editorials and organized local opposition, which found it fit for "barbarians."[28] *Le Petit moniteur universel* quipped that famed Greenland explorer Fridtjof Nansen could imagine a dog-drawn tram for "Eskimos," but not Parisians.[29] Conservative journalist Jules Claretie

27 John Merriman, *The Margins of City Life: Explorations on the French Urban Frontier, 1815–1851* (Oxford, UK, 1991); Tyler Stovall, *The Rise of the Paris Red Belt* (Berkeley, 1990).

28 "Le tramway des barbares," *La Justice*, 23 March 1897, 3; "Le tramway des barbares," *Le Matin*, 25 March 1897, 2; "Assez! Nouvelle mutilation projetée," *La Presse*, 28 March 1897, 4. All French publications cited in this article were published in Paris unless otherwise stated.

29 "Echos du jour," *Le Petit moniteur universel*, 29 March 1897, 1.

Figure 3. Two horse trams pass each other on the Avenue des Gobelins. Photographic postcard dated by the sender to 1904, author's collection.

demanded "outcry" and "fury" against the "odious tramway." Recalling decades of Haussmannization, he expressed "fear" that new trams would wake Haussmann's "ghost" to continue his mutilation of the streetscape from beyond the grave.[30] Critics worried about traffic congestion, public safety, and above all monumental aesthetics. The new line crossed the east plaza of Paris's celebrated classically named avenue, the Champs-Élysées. American William Walton observed "the jealous care with which the Parisians guard the ornamental features of the Champs-Élysées."[31] Recalling tramway protests later, French socialist Paul Brousse similarly called Parisians "jealous of the beauty of their boulevards."[32] Although this was only the first tramline to be tarred "barbarians' tramway," the prestige of the Champs-Élysées ensured that protest of this line was particularly intense.

In April, conservative municipal and national politicians tried blocking the tramline with a state buyout and a police declaration of unsafety, but they were outvoted three to one. Leftists cheered this "democratic tramway," arguing that it "will not injure the appearance of the Champs-Élysées at all." Conservatives replied snidely, "The democratic tramway . . . will be pulled by democratic horses," and charged that the tramway and its supporters were barbaric threats to the cityscape, a trophy case of civilization.[33] One writer slurred suburban commuters: "Every day the barbarians make their descent

30 Jules Claretie, *La Vie à Paris* 1897 (Paris, 1898), 110; "Le tramway des barbares," 9 May 1897, 2; "À l'Hôtel de Ville," 21 May 1897, 2; "Les journaux de ce matin," 24 May 1897, 2, all in *Le Matin*.

31 William Walton, *Paris: From the Earliest Period to the Present Day* (Philadelphia, 1900), 8:83.

32 Paul Brousse and Albert Bassède, *Les transports* (Paris, 1912), 139.

33 "Les interpellations," *Le Matin*, 4 April 1897, 1; horses quote from "Le tramway des barbares," *Le Matin*, 9 May 1897, 2; see also "Le tramway des barbares," *Le Matin*, 25 May 1897, 2.

into the heart of Paris."[34] Independent journalist Edmond Lepelletier called them "hordes," "migrators," "Goths," and "Huns."[35] Critics imagined suburban barbarians invading the New Rome aboard tramways.

One periodical, the *Bibliothèque universelle et revue Suisse*, found these protests fickle and irrational, echoing Gustave Le Bon's recent theory of crowd psychology. Elite protest was an unlikely target for a theory emphasizing masses and mobs, but the editors made it fit. Le Bon diagnosed the masses as volatile and suggestible; thus, this publication argued that press misinformation created anti-tramway protest. First, like all French public works, tramways required an "inquiry of public utility" to officially collect public opinion about a project before approval. By offering no opinions or objections, citizens forfeited their chance to protest the tramway. Later, press invective about barbarism and vandalism "suddenly" stoked protest. Protestors villainizing this single tram ignored that four tramlines already crossed the Champs-Élysées, where accidents were rare. Thus, aesthetics and safety were less motivating than protestors claimed. The *Bibliothèque universelle* detected other motives derived from mass psychology and media influence.[36]

The new tram opened in mid-May, already "famous" (*fameux*) or "too famous" (*trop fameux*).[37] G. d'Azambuja, editorialist for the ultramontane Catholic paper *L'Univers,* wrote that the tramway had "won" its "duel" with the Champs-Élysées, raising aesthetic questions about the western "luxurious quarters" (*quartiers de luxe*) or "beautiful quarters" (*beau quartiers*). He mourned "the magnificence of ancient times." From Babylon's Hanging Gardens to the "splendors" of Nineveh, Thebes, Palmyra, and the "marvelous Roman Forum," classical grandeurs had "fallen into ruins" or vanished "beneath the sand." Such losses were "returns of barbary" (*retours de barbarie*). Less shrill than other critics, d'Azambuja offered a neoclassical elegy for civilizational change and loss.[38]

34 Quoted in Walton, *Paris*, 8:84.

35 Quoted in Faure, "Les invasions barbares," 106.

36 "Chronique Parisienne," *Bibliothèque universelle et revue Suisse*, May 1897, 378–387, at 380–381; Jean Robert, *Les Tramways Parisiens*, 3rd ed. (Neuilly-sur-Seine, 1992), 57, 79, 102–103.

37 "À travers Paris," *Le Petit Journal*, 19 May 1897, 3; "Le tramway des barbares," *La Justice*, 21 May 1897, 2.

38 G. d'Azambuja, "Ça et là: Quartiers de luxe," *L'Univers*, 22 May 1897, 1–2.

Close behind aesthetics and civilization were safety concerns. In the tramway's early weeks, papers from left-liberal *La Justice* to populist *Le Matin* discussed traffic congestion and accidents. Could pedestrians enjoy elegant streets swarmed with dangerous vehicles? Could residents safely navigate their neighborhoods? One consolation for critics was that the barbarians' tramway was horse-drawn, not motorized. Police manned its route to manage traffic, where one officer was hit by a small horse carriage (*fiacre*).[39] This accident emboldened critics to demand again that police shut down the tram for safety reasons, but the police sensibly blamed the carriage, not the tram.[40]

The now-famous tramway ran for two weeks until a new protest erupted (see figure 4). On May 28, 1897, organized working-class riders from Montrouge occupied the tram, turning this mobility machine into a protest and publicity machine. They hung a large fabric banner from the roof deck reading: "The Barbarians of Montrouge to the Recalcitrant Press." En route, protesters "shouted ultra-revolutionary slogans," and upon reaching the ritzy Avenue d'Antin, they rushed local bars and denounced the district's "savages." The Montrougians ironically embraced their own barbarity *and* condemned the bourgeois "savages" who would exclude them from western neighborhoods.[41] One protester told Catholic newspaper *La Croix*: "We are civilized people. And en route to Saint-Philipe-du-Roule!" — stressing that suburban worshipers took the tram to church.[42] Protesters threw civilization, Catholicism, and tramway protest back at conservatives.

Montrougians also bragged that "the Montmartrois, who have a reputation for wit, could have done no better," but later that summer, Montmartre's irreverent cabarets produced several satirical sketches entitled "The Barbarians' Tramway." One sketch featured a ridiculous cardboard tram dragging two sheep through a crowd of riotous protestors and harried police. Foreign observers also saw humor here. Britain's celebrated funny paper *Punch* printed a sing-song poem demanding,

39 "Le tramway des barbares," *La Justice*, 21 May 1897, 2; "Le tramway des barbares," *Le Matin*, 21 May 1897, 2; "La Ville," *La Justice*, 22 May 1897, 2; "Le tramway des barbares," *L'Univers*, 23 May 1897, 5; "Première victime," *Le Matin*, 24 May 1897, 3; "Le tramway des barbares," *Gil Blas*, 25 May 1897, 3.

40 "Le tramway des barbares," *Le Matin*, 25 May 1897, 2; "Le tramway des barbares," *La Justice*, 26 May 1897, 2; E. Bois-Glavy, "Le tramway des Champs-Elysées," *Le Journal*, 26 May 1897, 2.

41 "Le tramway des barbares," *Le Matin*, 29 May 1897, 3 (all quotes this source); "Les 'barbares' de Montrouge," *L'Illustration*, 5 June 1897, 452; Walton, *Paris*, 8:83–84.

42 "Le tramway des barbares," *La Croix* (supplement) 30 May 1897, 3.

DEMONSTRATION ON THE CHAMPS-ÉLYSÉES BY THE INHABITANTS, THE "BARBARES," OF MONTROUGE ON THE OPENING OF THE NEW TRAMWAY FROM THAT QUARTER IN MAY, 1897.

Figure 4. Illustration of the May 1897 Montrouge protest, from: William Walton, *Paris from Earliest Times to the Present Day* (Philadelphia, 1899), author's collection.

"Why this sudden *melée* / is a mad dog astray?"[43] From Paris's popular periphery in Montrouge and Montmartre to London, humorists parodied bourgeois tramway protests.

Some newspapers defended the Montrougians. Liberal *Le XIXe siècle* said suburban protesters were "justly aggrieved" (*justement froissés*) at being called "barbarian" because this tram, useful for so many, would "perhaps bother a few fancy ladies" (*gêne peut-être quelques belles madames*).[44] For this paper and *La Petite Presse*, the protesters rightly prioritized the public utility of infrastructure over the complaints of a few bourgeoises in fancy neighborhoods. Progressives thought tradition should bend to modernity.[45] In literary paper *Gil Blas*, Léo Trézenik offered a colorful defense of Montrouge's "barbarians" with a hint of irony. Calling the protestors "heroes" and "Huns," he strikingly likened them to Gallic king Vercingetorix, enemy of Julius Cesar. Trézenik also used chauvinistic Native American–inflected language against wealthy women as "squaws" (he used the English term) protecting their "wigwams." By pitting "Gauls" against wealthy women, he gendered male victors and female victims, blurring Gallic resistance to Roman imperialism and modern European imperialism in the Americas. He unmasked the "civilized"

43 Montmartre quote from Walton, *Paris*, 84; "A Paris Impromptu," *Punch* 29 May 1897, 262; "Tablettes Théatrales," *Le Matin*, 26 June, 27 June, 2 July, and especially 31 July 1897, all p. 4; "Spectacles Divers," *Gil Blas*, 26 June, 27 June, and 3 July 1897, all p. 3; "Courrier des Theatres," *La Justice*, 29 June 1897, 3.

44 "Les on-dit," *Le XIXe siècle*, 30 May 1897, 1.

45 "Echos et Nouvelles," *Le Petite Presse*, 1 June 1897, 1–2; "Echos et Nouvelles," *Le Pays*, 1 June 1897, 1–2.

residents of the wealthy 8th Arrondissement as foreign, American, racialized, and barbaric, while protesters defended the "democratic, socialist, and revolutionary" tramway.[46]

The next week, newspapers reported that pro-tramway activists had occupied cafés on the Avenue du Maine, along the tramway's route in the Left Bank 14th Arrondissement. Like the Montrougians and the *Bibliothèque universelle*, these protesters decried "offensive" (*désobligeant*) press bias and "partiality" in negative tramway coverage. One café owner hosting protesters said that Right Bank elites were "shocked" when "our blouses cross the Champs-Élysées." Signaling class conflict, he juxtaposed the iconic working-class *blouse* with the 8th district's "aristocrats."[47]

Controversy simmered into late 1897. Cabarets and theaters parodied the barbarians' tramway while newspapers chronicled its accidents. In June, two young men were hurt when the tramway toppled their tandem bicycle.[48] In August, the tram crushed a young boy named Henri Gadignon, severing his right foot.[49] Montmartre's satirical songwriters were watching the accident pages. A December cabaret tune featured a vendor on the Champs-Elysées selling first aid supplies to locals injured by the barbarians' tramway.[50]

As debate continued and *Le Figaro* demanded "mass protest" that never came, commentators revealed the national context of these local disputes — the public works preparing Paris, and especially its western neighborhoods, for the 1900 Universal Exposition.[51] *Le Pays* mourned the "death" of the Champs-Élysées, "decapitated" by the barbarians' tramway.[52] In October, the newspapers *Le Matin* and *La Justice* reported a plan to expand morning commute service on the barbarians' tramway for laborers building the exposition grounds.[53] A letter to leftwing *L'Aurore* from "Decagon" unfavorably likened the barbarians' tramway to the Gare d'Orléans train station (today the Musée d'Orsay) underway for 1900.[54] *L'Aurore* editorialist Eugène Thebault criticized the exposition as an

46 Léo Trézenik, "Les voyageurs à 15 Fr. le cent," *Gil Blas*, 31 May 1897, 1.

47 "Le tramway des barbares," *La Justice*, 6 June 1897, 3; "Le tramway des Champs-Elysees," *La Petite Presse*, 6 June 1897, 1. Alain Faure, "La blouse ouvrière au XIXe siècle: Les normes de la dignité," *Modes pratiques* 1 (2015): 148–173.

48 "Faits divers," *La Liberté*, 16 June 1897, 3; "Accident de voiture," *Le Pays*, 18 June 1897, 3.

49 "Le tramway des barbares," *La Justice*, 10 August 1897, 3.

50 "Les premières," *Le Gaulois*, 20 December 1897, 3.

51 "Échos: À travers Paris," *Le Figaro*, 22 June 1897, 1; see also: "À l'Hôtel de Ville," *Le Matin*, 14 June 1897, 3; "Les journaux de ce matin," *Le Matin*, 21 June 1897, 2; "Chronique Parisienne," *La Croix*, 22 June 1897, 3.

52 "L'exposition de 1900," *Le Pays*, 17 June 1897, 1–2, quotes 2.

53 "Conseil municipal," *Le Matin*, 19 October 1897, 2; "Le tramway des Champs-Elysees," *La Justice*, 20 October 1897, 2.

54 Decagone, "Cartes postales," *L'Aurore*, 27 October 1897, 1.

investment craze for financiers who would further damage the Champs-Élysées, already marred by the famous tramway.[55] While officials used the exposition to justify tramway expansion, the event raised national identity issues: How would France present itself to the world? For the exposition's harshest critics, the event embodied France's barbaric decline and tramways were merely symptomatic.[56]

In early 1898, the *Journal des transports*, an international review of railways and navigation, favorably reviewed a controversial CGO plan to motorize several horse trams. Among them was the barbarians' tramway, which the editors described pointedly: "the famous tramway . . . which [public] opinion, at an overexcited moment — but how artificially? — nicknamed 'the barbarians' tramway.'" With little elaboration, the editors portrayed the nickname as unfair and unfitting.[57] Weeks later, the equally progressive city administration journal *Revue municipale* made similar moves to rethink the nickname. Author A. Perrier welcomed motorization: horse trams, including the original barbarians' tramway, were backward and brutish, not because of aesthetics or class conflict, but rather for being technologically and socially outdated, "utilizing old horses, old cars, and perhaps even old habits." Like the Montrougians, Perrier gave the phrase "barbarians' tramway" a new and progressive meaning.[58]

In September 1898, the epithet barbarians' tramway touched a projected Trocadero–Neilly tram that would cross the Bois de Boulogne, one of Paris's two largest parks. Again, the beautiful quarters were at stake. Newspapers noted, as if recruiting protesters, that this project, like all public works, would require an inquiry of public utility with comment from the public.[59] *Le Petit journal* called it "A project of vandals."[60] In October, the conservative *Journal des débats*, moderate *Le Journal*, and progressive *Le Radical* used similar language to oppose motorized trams crossing the Place de l'Étoile, site of

55 Eugène Thebault, "L'Anse de panier," *L'Aurore*, 13 November 1897, 1.

56 Jacquemet, "La violence à Belleville," 158; Peter Soppelsa, "Paris's 1900 Universal Exposition and the Politics of Urban Disaster," *French Historical Studies* 36 (2013): 271–298.

57 Henry Haguet, "Le programme des omnibus," *Le journal des transports*, 22 January 1898, 37–38, quote 37.

58 A. Perrier, "Les tramways dans le département de la Seine: Question d'attelages," *Revue municipal*, 5 March 1898, 297–299, quote 297.

59 "Nouvelles diverses," *Journal des débats*, 15 September 1898, 3; "Chronique," *L'univers*, 15 September 1898, 3; "Nouvelles lignes de tramways," *Le Pays*, 16 September 1898, 5; "Courrier de Paris," *L'Illustration*, 24 September 1898, 194.

60 "Un projet de vandals," *Le petit journal*, 18 September 1898, 1.

the Arc de Triomphe.[61] In March 1899, municipal councilors rejected the proposed line.[62]

Such victories against tramway expansion were rare. In August 1899, the satirical paper *Le Journal amusant* mocked the capital's aesthetic defenders, citing Edmond Benoit-Levy's Society of Fine Arts and Friends of Paris, and reminding readers ironically that campaigns in the name of "art" against the Eiffel Tower and the original barbarians' tramway had succeeded (they failed). Surely, Benoit-Levy's new crusade against public advertisements would be equally successful! Like Montmartre's songwriters, this popular humorist mocked bourgeois tramway protests as laughable elitism.[63]

Later that year, a proposal to expand Romainville–Opera service projected a tram on the rue du 4-September in the central 2nd district. Organized residents petitioned the Minister of Public Works about this "barbarians' tramway" and "act of vandalism."[64] By January 1900, newspapers from nationalist *Le Figaro* to center-left *Le Temps* declared their opposition. Again, aesthetics and safety were not the only concerns. Historians Jacquemet and Faure showed that these protesters also sought to exclude workers from their neighborhood.[65] *Le Figaro* boasted of its sustained combat against barbaric tramways and noted that cycling magazine *Le Vélo* (the Bike) mounted its own campaign against a "tramway of death" on the Maisons-Lafitte bridge. The 300-meter-long bridge crowded two tram tracks that would normally require ten meters of width onto a six-meter-wide roadway, leaving little room for cyclists, equestrians, pedestrians, or automobilists to pass trams, tossing them all into a "murderous salad."[66] Despite ongoing debate about aesthetics and safety, Director of Works architect Joseph Bouvard, the head of public works for the department of the Seine, encouraged municipal councilors to stay optimistic about tramway growth.[67]

61 "Nouvelles diverses," *Journal des débats*, 14 October 1898, 3; "Nouvelles diverses," *Le journal*, 14 October 1898, 3; "Échos et nouvelles," *Le radical*, 15 October 1898, 2.

62 "À travers Paris," *Le Figaro*, 1 January 1899, 1; "'Tramway des barbares,'" *New York Herald*, 1 January 1899, 1; "Conseil Municipal de Paris," *Le petit parisien*, 25 March 1899, 2; "Conseil municipal," *Le Pays*, 26 March 1899, 4.

63 Xanrof, "Chronique," *Le journal amusant*, 19 August 1899, 5–6.

64 "Nouvelles diverses," *Journal des débats*, 27 December 1899, 2; "Echos de partout," *Le Petit Journal*, 27 December 1899, 2.

65 "À travers Paris," *Le Figaro*, 1 January 1900, 1; "Cela ne pouvait pas manquer," *Le Matin*, 1 January 1900, 3; "Le tramway de Romainville," *Le Temps* 11 January 1900, 2; "Le tramway de la rue du Quatre-Septembre," *Le Temps* 18 January 1900, 1; Jacquemet, "Voirie, transports et équipement urbain," 249n25; Faure, "Les invasions barbares."

66 "Le tramway de mort," *Le Figaro*, 1 January 1900, 4.

67 "À L'Hôtel de Ville," *La Lanterne*, 1 January 1900, 2.

Le Journal writer E. Bois-Glavy criticized the tramway opponents' "aristocratic instincts," asking "Are the proposed tramways so frightful?" The new 2nd district line, he wrote, would not only serve Romainville, but also connect the wider working-class periphery with the Right Bank's commercial core, satisfying a decade of suburban demand for access to central Paris. He reminded readers that the *Journal* had long opposed defiling the "*beau promenades*" and "mounted a vigorous campaign" against the original barbarians' tramway and the cancelled tram through the Bois de Boulogne. But this new 2nd district line was different. No "aesthetic pretext" could justify keeping tramways from busy streets that were "differently elegant" (*autrements élégantes*). Claiming that the line was useless because east Paris workers did not want Opera access was a "bad" or "cruel" joke (*mauvaise plaisanterie*). The new tram would ease commutes for those who worked far from home, raising questions of "true democracy" that the 2nd district's republican and radical politicians ought to recognize. "Before protesting," he ended, consider foreign cities, where tramways rode even the wealthiest, most elegant avenues. His full-throated defense of the proposed tram showed the geographic and conceptual limits of tramway criticism. While opposing tramways out west, he welcomed them elsewhere. His rhetoric blended familiar conservative critiques and democratic defenses of tramways.[68]

Though these debates regarded specific districts and streets, their national significance resurfaced as the 1900 exposition approached. In March, independent rightist paper *L'Intransigeant* linked the barbarians' tramway to a project by French President Emile Loubet to renovate the Champs-Élysées, which it compared to recent national scandals, the Panama and Dreyfus Affairs. Using pitched rhetoric and veiled antisemitism, they called the president "[King] Panama I," a "provincial vandal" (*vandale montillien*) and a "sticky nougat" (*nougat poisseux*), too soft. "Uprooted" (*déraciné*) from Montélimar and "transplanted" in Paris, he therefore lacked

68 E. Bois-Glavy, "Le Tramway de la rue du 4-Septembre," *Le Journal*, 17 January 1900, 2.

loyalty. The editorial ended by calling left-leaning municipal councilors allies of Dreyfus and Panama I, "idiots," "crooks" (*filous*) and "traitors." This nasty editorial combined claims of local loyalty and national identity, again articulated in gendered and ethnocentric terms.[69]

Days later in centrist *La Presse*, Léon Bailby called a new Charenton–Concorde "barbarians' tramway" an aesthetic "threat" to another elegant western plaza, the Place de la Concorde.[70] Soon the self-styled "progressive republican" paper *La Petite Presse* joined the chorus, calling a proposed tramway on the central *grands boulevards* "monstrous," "utilitarian," and "shameful." The editors bemoaned the "Americanism" inflicted upon this celebrated historic royal parade route by "engineers" and "financiers." National interest and patriotism, they argued, required resisting such attempts to turn Paris into New York or London.[71] The Liberal Catholic periodical *Le Correspondant* orientalized the trams, decrying "such mutilations, profanations, deformations, which will fatally end by making of the former aesthetic capital of the world the gigantic and vulgar caravan-station of the future democracy."[72] *Le Figaro*'s editors, consistently stoking protest, made their "nationalist" motives explicit while mourning that they could not save the Champs-Élysées.[73] Thus papers across the editorial spectrum blew religious, regional, and racial dog whistles, othering tramways as African, Asian, and American threats to French civilization. Such nationalist and xenophobic claims stood in tension with the ongoing "universal" exposition.

As *Le Figaro* recognized, the exposition not only buoyed nationalism symbolically, but also renewed conservative opposition to the Republic. The leftist majority on the municipal council lost several seats as the tramway controversies continued. From fall 1900 into 1901, conservatives, especially the vocal 8th district municipal councilors including Pierre Quentin-Bauchard, sustained tramway protest as another line threatened the Champs-Élysées.[74] Quentin-Bauchard

69 "Panama 1er Vandale," *L'Intransigeant*, 24 March 1900, 1.

70 "Nouveaux tramways," *La Presse*, 31 March 1900, 1.

71 L.S., "Un tramway sur les grands boulevards," *La Petite Presse*, 6 April 1900, 1.

72 "Les oeuvres et les hommes," *Le Correspondant*, vol. 198 (January-April 1900), 416.

73 "A la surface," *Le Figaro*, 11 May 1900, 1; E., "Notes d'un parisien," *Le Figaro*, 17 August 1900, 3.

74 "À l'Hôtel-de-Ville," *Le Journal*, 25 October 1900, 3; "Hôtel de Ville," *La Petite Presse*, 4 July 1901, 1–2; "Hôtel de Ville," *Le Pays*, 4 July 1901, 1–2; "Les tramways de Paris au Conseil Municipal," *Journal des transports*, 13 July 1901, 350.

repeated familiar anti-tramway rhetoric, for example echoing Jules Claretie with a "fear for the future."[75] Progressive *Le Radical* called these councilors "reactionary" and charged that they criticized tramways "at their ease" (*à leur aise*), in other words speaking too freely without regard for audience or context.[76]

Conservatives feared a future that would sacrifice form for function, leaving Paris "ugly" (*laid*). In the *Journal des débats*, Alcide Ebray argued that "the utilitarianism and industrialism of present times no longer respect anything."[77] Critics consistently cast such coarse modernization as American. Quentin-Bauchard had earlier pronounced, "Paris should not be treated like an American city," while Léon Bailby in *La Presse* warned that Paris would become "as brilliant, as new — and also as ugly — as Chicago."[78] From 1900 to 1902, the municipal council gradually softened limits on installing trolleys, briefly bringing them to the center of ongoing tramway debate.[79] After March 1902, when the CGO moved to motorize the original barbarians' tramway (see figure 1), *Le Petit Journal* moaned that "the too famous barbarians' tramway" was becoming "more and more barbaric!"[80] Months later, in an opinion piece, "The Cursed Trolley," for independent paper *L'Éclair*, L. Roger-Milès chided tramway critics who "reopened the faucet of municipal tears." They evinced "a sort of sentimental enfeeblement" (*affaiblissement sentimental*) that left them unable to distinguish monuments worth preserving from places worth rebuilding. The critics, he argued, exaggerated the streetscape's "immutability," taking preservation too far. Opposing all urban change only held Paris back.[81]

That same year, Paris's tramway troubles reached international audiences after Prime Minister Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau was injured when a tram hit his automobile. London's *Observer* and *Spectator* were watching, as was "all of Europe" according to the *Spectator*. The British *Electrical Engineer* reported that the crash reignited ongoing tramway debates in Vienna.[82] The *New York Times* posted updates on his

75 *Bulletin Municipal Officiel*, 2 July 1901, 2190–2194; *Bulletin Municipal Officiel*, 6 January 1902, 171–173, quote 172.

76 "Les travaux de Paris," *Le Radical*, 2 January 1901, 2; "Conseil municipal," *Le Radical*, 30 June 1901, 2 (quotes from this source).

77 Alcide Ebray, "Guillaume II et Berlin," *Journal des debats*, 29 October 1901, 2.

78 Quentin-Bauchard in "À l'Hôtel-de-Ville," *Le Journal*, 25 October 1900, 3; Léon Bailby, "Le nouveau jeu," *La Presse*, 20 November 1902, 1.

79 Soppelsa, "Paris's 1900 Universal Exposition"; Soppelsa, "Reworking Appropriation."

80 "Too famous" in "Echos de partout," *Le Petit journal*, 7 May 1902, 2; "barbaric" in "Le tramway des barbares," *Le Petit journal*, 24 March 1902, 2.

81 L. Roger-Milès, "Le trolley maudit," *L'Éclair*, 10 October 1902, 1.

82 "M. Waldeck-Rousseau's Accident," *The Observer*, 2 March 1902, 5; "News of the Week," *The Spectator*, 8 March 1902, 349; "Business Notes: Traction," *The Electrical Engineer*, 7 March 1902, 352–55, at 354.

recuperation over two weeks.[83] The Prime Minister's story reached the anglophone *Japan Weekly Mail* via French colonial Saigon and traveled as far as Australia and New Zealand papers.[84] At home, Paris independent *L'Évenement* connected his accident with familiar traffic and safety concerns, speculating that he might (now) support increased tramway regulation.[85]

In the early 1900s, the phrase barbarians' tramway faded without disappearing. In 1903, the conservative city of Versailles opposed a new "barbarians' tramway" from Paris.[86] Paul Gaulot, writing for women's magazine *Le monde modern et femme d'aujourdhui* (*The modern world and woman of today*) in 1904, called the "famous" tramway "picturesque."[87] Overtly positive but faintly dismissive, Gaulot's wording suggests that the tramway's bad reputation was slowly dwindling.

In 1905, when officials proposed another tramway in the Bois de Boulogne, controversy emerged around the threat to planted trees. The *promenade plantée* (planted promenade) was an essential urban form in the luxurious quarters, the nexus of bourgeois street life. It comprised rows of trees (especially chestnut) shading paved or gravel walking paths, often integrated into avenues, boulevards, plazas, or parks. Conservative *Le Figaro*, literary *Gil Blas*, and progressive *Le Radical* joined the critique.[88] Edmond Le Roy, in political journal *La revue diplomatique*, argued that times had changed since the barbarians' tramway opened. Parisians, he suggested, had greeted 1897's bourgeois protest with a populist and dismissive, "What does it matter to me! The Champs-Élysées is the quarter of the *aristos*" (aristocrats). By contrast, he argued, in 1905 luxurious locations like the Champs-Élysées and the Bois de Boulogne were filled each Sunday with visitors from across the region thanks to the Métro. As mass transit provided more comprehensive access to Paris, the tree-lined luxurious quarters were no longer an elitist enclave, but everyone's concern.[89] Like Bois-Glavy, Le Roy stitched together popular enthusiasm for mass transit and elite defense of western districts. In so doing, he revealed the reality of social mixing that elite tramway critics had long feared.

83 "Waldeck-Rousseau Hurt in an Accident," *New York Times*, 1 March 1902, 9; "French Premier's Condition," *New York Times*, 1 March 1902, 4; "Waldeck-Rousseau's Condition," *New York Times*, 3 March 1902, 9; "Waldeck-Rousseau Drives Out," *New York Times*, 14 March 1902, 9.

84 "Accident to M. Waldeck Rousseau," *Japan Weekly Mail*, 8 March 1902, 272; "Accident to the French Premier," *Morning Bulletin* (AU), 3 March 1902, 5; "Accident to French Premier," *Colonist* (NZ), 7 March 1902, 3.

85 Frontis, "Notes Parisiennes," *L'Événement*, 3 March 1902, 1.

86 "De Paris à Versailles et à Saint-Cloud," *Le petit journal*, 8 July 1903, 6.

87 Paul Gaulot, "La place Louis XV de 1757 à 1795," *Le monde moderne* 20, no. 1 (1904): 17–26, quote 18.

88 Le passant, "Le chute des arbres," *Le Figaro*, 14 September 1905, 1; Un parisien, "Bavardage," *Le Radical*, 16 September 1905, 1; Louis d'Hurcourt, "Propos du jour," *Gil Blas*, 24 September 1905, 1.

89 Edmond Le Roy, "La vie Parisienne," *La revue diplomatique*, 10 September 1905, 5.

A 1907 rant from *Le Figaro* titled "Destins," published a decade after the original protests, illustrates the continuing salience of these fears: "Oh universal Americanism! Oh the vandalism of governance! Oh ramparts of Avignon! Oh barbarians' tramway! Oh the plague of democracy!" This remarkable exclamation connected tramways with foreign influence, republican government, historical preservation, and democracy in a dramatic lament about declining civilization. *Le Figaro* linked democracy with leveling, a mass culture that valued "quantity" over "quality," lessening classical aristocratic virtues like distinction and excellence.[90]

The editors of building magazine *La Construction moderne* addressed *Le Figaro*'s pitched tone and advocated balancing urban development with historical preservation. They noted that "today every administration is accused, and sometimes charged [*atteinte*] and convicted [*convaincue*] of vandalism. When it's not a crime [*délit*], it's at least a sickness [*epidémie*]."[91] This quote reveals that charges of "vandalism" could be widespread and unfair. *La Construction moderne* validated traffic, safety, aesthetics, and preservation as planning issues, but joined other specialized periodicals in cooling debate by contesting the tone of heated newspaper editorials and political oratory.

In 1909, the 8th district's municipal councilors made their swan song, proposing pedestrian tunnels under the Champs-Élysées to bypass the barbarians' tramway and renewed limits on trolleys to slow tramway electrification.[92] These proposals were interrupted by major changes in transport governance: the 1910 expiration of the CGO's 1860 charter and the 1913 withdrawal of all remaining horsecars.[93] Now Paris's tramway debates declined more quickly. Except for the central 2nd district, most tramway protest from 1897 to 1909 occupied a discrete wealthy western area: the neighboring 8th and 16th districts and the Bois de Boulogne. As journalist-politician Gabriel "Mermeix" Terrail wrote in 1911, western anti-tramway

90 "Destins," *Le Figaro* 20 June 1907, 1.

91 "Actualités," *La Construction Moderne*, 29 June 1907, 457–459, quote 458.

92 *Bulletin Municipal Officiel*, 20 February 1909, 922–923; "Pour faciliter la circulation," *Le Temps*, 21 February 1909, 3; "Echos de partout," *Le Gaulois*, 27 February 1909, 1.

93 Peter Soppelsa, "The End of Horse Transportation in Belle Epoque Paris," *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 24 (2017): 113–129.

organizing revealed the area's "aristocratic pretentions."[94] The elitism and nostalgia of these loudest tramway protests increasingly clashed with early-twentieth-century notions of modernity.

A 1914 article about traffic congestion reprinted in *Le Pays* and *La Petite Presse* asked, given growing tramway traffic, "Where are the furors which unleashed themselves previously during the implementation of the famous barbarians' tramway . . . ?"[95] But the fury was subsiding. As electric tramways became normalized, neoclassicism receded, and charges of "barbarism" lost their sting. In 1921, leftist paper *Le Cri de Paris* asked "How many Parisians still remember" the barbarians' tramway. Personnel on the Montrouge–Gare de l'Est line jokingly called each other "barbarians," calling out, "En route, les Barbares!" The editors wondered whether these employees "knew the original sense of the nickname."[96] In 1925, *L'Intransigeant*, which earlier railed against the barbarians' tramway and the exposition in ethnocentric and nationalist terms, now celebrated tramways as cosmopolitan tools of social mixing and proof of Parisians' "Roman blood."[97] These shifts in the epithet's meaning, from negative and anti-Roman to positive and Roman, and from currency to memory, help pinpoint when and why tramway protest ended.

Though charges of barbarism resonated less in interwar Paris, they were still deployed more broadly in diagnosing the decline of Western civilization associated with Oswald Spengler in Germany and Georges Duhamel in France. Across the twentieth century, French sources described the barbarians' tramway as a curious artifact of collective memory.[98] Demographer René Martial wrote in 1933, "Forty years ago, the so-called 'tramways of penetration,' departing the suburbs to reach the center of Paris, began to disfigure the latter. It was the tramway from Montrouge which, crossing the roundabout of the Champs-Élysées, received the name barbarians' tramway. But it was only the first."[99]

94 Mermeix Gabriel Terrail, *L'Angleterre: Aspects inconnus* (Paris, 1911), 8.

95 "La vie municipale," *Le Pays*, 17 January 1914, 2; "La vie municipale," *Le Petite Presse*, 18 January 1914, 2.

96 "Les 'Barbares,'" *Le Cri de Paris*, 12 June 1921, 7.

97 André Laphin, "Où l'on parle du tramway des 'Barbares,'" *L'Intransigeant*, 8 December 1925, 1–2.

98 Robert Dieudonné, "Les nouveau visages de Paris," *La nouvelle revue feminine*, 1 August 1933, 120–123; "À travers Paris," *Le Figaro*, 3 January 1950, 7; Jean Galtier-Boissière, *Mémoires d'un Parisien* (Paris, 1960), 37.

99 René Martial, "Le mouvement de population dans les villes," *Annales d'hygiène publique, industrielle et sociale,* series 11, no. 10 (October 1933): 541–565, quote 562.

Conclusion

Tramway critics coined the phrase "barbarians' tramway" in 1897 to link mass transit with the perceived dangers of modernity: speed, accidents, democracy, and Americanization. These wealthy, bourgeois, conservative, Catholic, reactionary, and populist Parisians sought to save the "New Rome" from modernization. But pro-tramway protests soon appropriated the phrase, reinforcing the centrality of modernity and democracy. Republicans, socialists, sympathetic journalists, humorists, workers, and commuters from the 14th district and suburbs from Montrouge to Romainville celebrated tramways, casting these mobility machines as vehicles of democracy and equality. They welcomed a progressive French civilization, technologically enhanced by electrification and motorization. While elitists called trams and their defenders "barbaric," the public flocked to them, celebrating their accessibility as "democratic" and "ten-centime" tramways.[100] The annual number of tramway riders grew from around 58 million in 1879 to peak at 700 million in 1928, expanding over tenfold as the epithet came and went.[101]

Growing mobility especially benefited suburban workers. As Martial noted, several "barbarian" tramways joined a regional "network of penetration" intended to connect city and suburbs. Increasing radial mobility in-and-out of Paris destabilized the centuries-old geography distinguishing the spaces within (*intra muros*) and beyond (*extra muros*) the city walls or limits. Tramways increased suburbanites' access to the city center. This core-periphery geography reveals the spatial meanings of the epithet, which expressed fear of social mixing and leveling caused by mass transit. Tramway critics revived classical terminology to express this fear as the barbarian invasion and sack of civilization, and the dilution of Frenchness by African, Asian, and American influences. Critics othered suburban "barbarians" as Goths, Huns, Apaches, and Eskimos. Importantly, progressive reversals of barbarian

100 "Les Tramways à 0.10 centimes," *L'Éclair*, 19 June 1896; "Les tramways à dix centimes," *L'Éclair*, 24 October 1897.

101 Robert, *Les Tramways Parisiens*, 527.

language, for example heroicizing "Gauls," underscored its familiarity and rhetorical force. Parisians appropriated tramways as tools of class conflict, cultural negotiation, even protest, reshaping the French watchword "civilization" for a modernizing era of democratization, electrification, and motorization. The epithet "barbarians' tramway" served both elitist/exclusive and popular/inclusive tramway protests as motorization transformed Paris streets.

This epithet had local, national, and transnational meanings. Locally, it meant specific tram lines, but also suggested that all trams were a bit barbaric. Nationally, it reflected deep questions about French identity's Gallic and Roman roots and its foreign influences, "American," "Oriental," or otherwise. Transnationally, Paris's debates connected and compared with tramway controversies in other cities, for example echoing the focus on fares analyzed by Hobsbawm and Fujii. Although Paris saw limited sabotage and violence against trams, mostly during worker strikes, its tramway protests were more peaceful than those elsewhere. Yet Paris' debates were fierce and fiery, waged in open conflict over society, urban form, and the future. Whether Paris was Roman, Gallic, French, or American, beautiful or ugly, civilized or barbaric, traditional or modern, tramways raised questions about what kind of city Parisians wanted to inhabit.

It is significant that tramways signaled foreign influence in both Paris, an imperial capital, and in Asian and Latin American cities under European influence (whether colonized or not). The connections of tramways and civilization were relevant transnationally amid imperialism and globalization. Paris's tramway discourse was transnational both because Parisians compared their capital to places outside France and because British, Swiss, Australian, New Zealander, Japanese, and U.S. observers watched Paris. Foreign intellectuals offer further evidence of widespread connections between tramways and civilization. Spanish author Antonio Azorin illustrated "a more horrid barbarity than in ancient times" by

recounting an old man crushed by a tram.[102] In 1910, Henry James charged U.S. streetcars with "a savagery and ruthlessness beyond conception."[103] In his noted 1917 lecture "Science as a Vocation," Max Weber invoked tramways and barbarians to illustrate modern "disenchantment." He wrote, "Unless he is a physicist, one who rides the streetcar has no idea how the car happened to get in motion." By contrast, "the savage knows incomparably more about his tools." Further left, Walter Benjamin reversed barbarism, claiming that World War I's "monstrous" technologies unleashed a "barbarism" unrecognizable to older generations who "had gone to school in horse-drawn streetcars."[104] Contemporary Argentine writer Ricardo Rojas also inverted barbarism. In characterizing modern cities he wrote, "barbarians do not ride horses but tramways."[105] These thinkers invoked tramways and barbarism to portray a modern world transformed by technology. Paris's tramway debates thus nested within transnational discourses about modernity, technology, and civilization, which often paired tramways and barbarism. Although the "barbarians' tramway" had local and national significance for Paris, the global resonance of its tramway debates suggests a larger story yet to be told about how tramways mattered in familiar debates about modernity and civilization that gripped the age of empire.

102 Lily Litvak, *A Dream of Arcadia: Anti-Industrialism in Spanish Literature, 1895–1905* (Austin, 2014), 84.

103 Ted Morgan, *Maugham* (New York, 1980), 167.

104 Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H.H. Gerth and C.W. Mills (New York, 1958), 139; Walter Benjamin, *The Storyteller Essays* (New York, 2019), 42–48.

105 Michela Coletta, *Decadent Modernity: Civilization and 'Latinidad' in Spanish America, 1880–1920* (Liverpool, 2018), 88n8.

Peter Soppelsa is an assistant professor in the Department of History of Science, Technology, and Medicine at the University of Oklahoma. His book *Inverting Haussmannization: Living with Infrastructure in Paris, 1870-1914* is under contract with the University of Pittsburgh Press.