

## Choreographies of the Great Departure: Building Civic Bodies in the 1914 *Masque of St. Louis*

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Over the course of five evenings in May 1914, more than eight thousand St. Louisans dressed up as Indians, Pioneers, and a host of allegorical figures—Gold, Poverty, and Imagination among them—to perform two versions of their city’s history before over a half million spectators. Hailed by George Pierce Baker as the crowning achievement of the early twentieth-century pageantry movement in the United States, *The Pageant and Masque of St. Louis* proved “what this drama of the masses may do for the masses.”<sup>[1]</sup>

As the most prominent Symbolist dramatist in the U.S., the *Masque*’s creator, Percy MacKaye, enjoyed a well-established reputation for plays in which “time is a dream” and in which “the real and the ideal, the substance and the show, the actor and the audience, the poet and the figment of the poet’s imagination” are all interchangeable.<sup>[2]</sup> A friend and advocate of modernist theatre pioneer Edward Gordon Craig, he echoed Craig’s attack on realism in his own writings and advocated instead for the use of emblematic design elements, allegorical plots, and figurative choreographies.<sup>[3]</sup> In his view, these were essential to what he called “rituals of democracy,” mass masques cultivating “the half-desire of the people not merely to remain receptive to a popular art created by specialists but to take part themselves in creating it.”<sup>[4]</sup> By enjoining his fellow theatre artists “to illumine and body forth the life of the people in perennial symbols of power and beauty,” MacKaye pointed to a convergence of Symbolist aesthetics and nationalist sentiment that distinguished his unique contributions to the pageant movement in the United States.<sup>[5]</sup>

The *Masque* was an elaborate work of verse drama, written in an erudite style and meant to be heard as well as seen. Nonetheless, like other pageants of its time, its narrative and its visual impact depended on the collective movement of large numbers of performers. Mass dances, pantomimes, and gestures allowed *Masque* performers to communicate its complex story to vast audiences that included spectators hundreds of yards from the stage. In U.S. pageantry, all scenes were, in some sense, crowd scenes. Due to their scale—with hundreds or thousands of citizens performing local histories for hundreds or thousands of their fellow citizens—mass pageants claimed an unambiguous correspondence between the actors and characters onstage, and the spectators in the audience. In doing so they were able to generate performative arguments about civic engagement, citizenship, and democracy on a grand scale, to promote certain kinds of collectivities over others, to incorporate communities seen as vital to the development of the social body, and to exclude communities that were regarded as dangerous to its integrity.

To date, David Glassberg’s *American Pageantry* (1990) is the only published work to offer a substantive discussion of *The Pageant and Masque of St. Louis*.<sup>[6]</sup> Though he notes the *Masque*’s significance as a work of theatre, he is mainly interested in how it reflects Progressive Era conceptions of public history. As such, he steers clear of performance-based analytical approaches. By contrast, I offer here a close analysis of the *Masque* as a multi-layered performance that sought to shape St. Louisans’ conceptions of

collectivity through embodied practices of dance, gesture, and pantomime, as well as the embodying practices of casting and puppetry. In what follows, I discuss how MacKaye's *Masque* performed processes of civilization and Americanization that were designed to influence the newly expanded white population of the city. I draw on archival materials, MacKaye's published works, contemporary secondary sources, and the text of the *Masque* to demonstrate how its three distinct choreographic modes sustained these processes. Its first and second modes of "playing Indian"—the ritualized and the savage—demonstrated for audiences the difference between rational forms of collective self-organization and wild expressions of collective fervor. The third mode, "Playing Pioneer," gave shape to an ideal civic body that was consistent with the political and economic vision of city officials.



*The Pageant and Masque of St. Louis* and its audience, courtesy of Dartmouth College Library.

Reaching its peak of influence in 1914, the American Pageantry movement, as it was called by its supporters, sought to achieve the complete transformation of society through the nationwide production of large-scale pageants: vast open-air historical dramas in which hundreds or thousands of local amateur performers participated.<sup>[7]</sup> Pageants could be fitted to almost any purpose, though they were nearly always associated with Progressive Era causes and themes. Whereas some reformers saw pageants as civic rituals that would, in time, give shape to a genuine democratic social order, others saw them as an efficient means of achieving immediate political reforms and modernization schemes. Given the wide range of aesthetic and social ideals to which pageants aspired, and the variety of communities that created them, it is not surprising that current scholarship concerned with the American Pageantry movement is similarly varied, tending to ground itself in matters specific to locality and history, and to organize itself around discrete social problems.<sup>[8]</sup>

For MacKaye, pageantry was an antidote to the problem of commercialized leisure and its effect on the white urban working classes. In *The Civic Theatre in Relation to the Redemption of Leisure* (1911), MacKaye's sweeping proposal to reform theatre in the United States, he writes that "The use of a nation's leisure is the test of its civilization. How then does [this gigantic producer America] organize his night leisure? Into what hands of public trust does he commit this most precious engine of national influence? Ignored by the indifference of public spirit, [it] has been left to be organized by private speculation—the amusement business."<sup>[9]</sup> For MacKaye, only the symbolist theatre's refusal to reproduce reality, its utopian insistence on transformation, and its emphasis on universality were powerful enough to redirect the gaze of spectators past motion-pictures, vaudeville, and burlesque shows, and

towards a “nobler theatre” existing “not primarily for the boards” but “in the mind of man.”<sup>[10]</sup> It is on that imaginary stage, MacKaye believed, that human beings may play their proper roles and begin to envision better forms of social organization.

The St. Louis Pageant Drama Association (SLPDA), organizers of *The Pageant and Masque*, had two interrelated aims: to inspire a sense of civic unity in a city with a rapidly growing and increasingly heterogeneous population, and to use this sense of civic engagement to convince voters to pass a new city charter calling for the construction of a downtown plaza and bridge. Three years earlier, Civic League members who had led the charter campaign represented it as a boon to business owners and real estate developers. When the campaign failed they blamed ethnic divisions that, from their perspective, kept residents focused on the growth of their own neighborhoods rather than on projects benefitting St. Louis as a whole. Reinvented as the SLPDA in 1914, former Civic League members argued that *The Pageant and Masque* would “influence and control the emotions of the masses that their civic activity will be along proper lines,” thereby convincing voters to pass the charter.<sup>[11]</sup> Whereas MacKaye drew on the language of art, spirituality, and the social good to explain the purpose of his masques and pageants, the SLPDA expressed its aims in terms of progress, efficiency, and the social order. Both, however, operated on the same collective subject: white St. Louisans whose collective mind needed redirection and cultivation, and whose collective body needed redefinition and reorganization.

By 1914 St. Louis had already been the site of several monumental celebrations including the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition and Olympic Games, the 1904 Democratic National Convention, and the 1909 Centennial of the city’s incorporation. Whether to surpass its own recent history of mass performances or to outdo other U.S. cities that had recently hosted mass pageants, the SLPDA made a bold decision when it agreed to MacKaye’s plan for a colossal double-feature. Thomas Wood Stevens’s naturalistic pageant would present historical episodes performed during daylight hours. Beginning at nightfall, MacKaye’s masque would reinterpret Stevens’s play in the mode of symbolism, employing allegorical mass characters, abstract design, and sequences of symbolic mass movement. MacKaye’s frequent collaborator, Joseph Lindon Smith, would direct and choreograph the *Masque*, which in the end took more than five hours to perform.<sup>[12]</sup>

The American Pageant Association defined the masque as a subgenre of pageantry in which the balance between realism and symbolism favored the latter.<sup>[13]</sup> The differences were more significant, however, for MacKaye. Whereas the function of a pageant is to reenact the past, the aim of a masque, according to MacKaye, is to point to the future progress of civilization. Unlike other pageants of the period, which MacKaye regarded as “tending [too much] toward the static,” his *Masque* sought to represent the dynamic energies of modern life with its crowded cities and its seemingly endless flows of people by means of “large rhythmic mass-movements of onward urge, opposition, recoil and again the sweep onward”—crowd movements that were part of the script and integral to the plot.<sup>[14]</sup>

The plan to produce both a pageant and a masque solved what MacKaye described as “a special problem in crowd psychology.”<sup>[15]</sup> Because “a huge, half-socialized, modern multitude [is] unused by experience to imagining,” the unique function of the *Masque* was to “lead the attention of [the] large masses” from the realistic images presented in the earlier *Pageant* towards symbolic forms representing the theme of the *Masque*: “the fall and rise of social civilization.”<sup>[16]</sup> The idea that civilizations, like organic species, must evolve or suffer extinction, was one to which MacKaye subscribed. Like many among the intellectual elite, he believed that European civilization was in a state of irreversible moral and physical

decline because of increasing political unrest and urban overcrowding, plagues that threatened to reach U.S. shores via the mass migration of Europe's working classes.

The *Masque* took place at the height of the "Great Departure," historian Tara Zahra's term for the period between 1846 and 1940 when more than fifty million Europeans moved to the Americas, the majority from Italy, Russia, and Austria-Hungary.<sup>[17]</sup> Between 1900 and 1910, St. Louis's foreign-born white population increased nearly 35%, leading to an overall population increase of nearly 20%. Because St. Louis's rapid growth was directly attributable to recent immigration, city officials recognized the need to communicate with a greater variety of immigrant communities than the city had seen in its history.

The SLPDA claimed *The Pageant and Masque* would break down divisions between the city's ethnically diverse communities. However, the eventual result of the six-month long casting process was to expand the definition of who counted as a St. Louisan by implicitly establishing whiteness, rather than duration of residency, as the only essential criterion. Although black St. Louisans outnumbered all but the city's German and Irish populations, and although the overall percentage of black residents was increasing at a much higher rate than that of white residents, only one Black St. Louisan appeared in MacKaye's *Masque*—in the allegorical role of Africa. St. Louis's Indigenous community was small by comparison with other ethnic groups. Nonetheless, when a Chippewa group proposed to perform in an exhibition baseball game for a fee the SLPDA declined their offer.<sup>[18]</sup> Not one Indigenous person appeared in MacKaye's *Masque*.

As one example of the "rituals of race" described by Alessandra Lorini, the *Masque of St. Louis* proposed to gather as many as possible under the sheltering canopy of whiteness in order to answer the question of how to create cohesive civic bodies in an age of racial and ethnic conflict.<sup>[19]</sup> Although the SLPDA's refusal to allow the Chippewa to participate was only one of many acts of exclusion from the pageant's history, the number and variety of Indigenous communities represented in the *Pageant* by white performers (Mississippians, Osage, Missouri, and more), in contrast to the total invisibility of black communities, invites questions concerning why "Indians" were so heavily represented in the *Masque*.

For the majority of its performers, participation in the city's largest civic spectacle meant covering one's face and body with copper greasepaint and "playing Indian," a concept Philip Deloria has used to describe performances of nativeness by non-native peoples that serve to negotiate contradictory models of U.S. national identity.<sup>[20]</sup> In the *Masque*, the symbolic value of Indian bodies is so great that actual Indigenous bodies, as persistent reminders of colonial violence, are rendered invisible. MacKaye himself blamed the "reverted social state" of "the Indian race" on the invasion of the hordes of the bison.<sup>[21]</sup> Building on Deloria's work, Shari Huhndorf provides additional context for an interpretation of the *Masque* through her focus on nineteenth- and twentieth-century examples of "going native" that contributed to "the regeneration of racial whiteness and Euro-American society," particularly during "moments of social crisis that [gave] rise to collective doubts about the nature of progress."<sup>[22]</sup>

In keeping with Huhndorf's assessment of the kinds of social malaise that "going native" has habitually addressed, representations of Indians in the *Masque* in fact bore little resemblance to other contemporary attempts to portray Indigenous peoples, such as those that took place in Wild West shows or World's Fairs. Rather, "playing Indian" in the *Masque* was a way to engage and represent white urban workers to themselves—the same leisure-seekers who MacKaye's Civic Theatre plan proposed to re-educate. That pageants often linked the bodies of Indians to those of white urban workers can be seen in countless

images that represent workers and Indians mirroring one another in costume or in gestures of submission. In cartoons like one from the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, *Masque* participants perform gestures involved in Indian work and ritual on a mound “built by Moundbuilders Local no. 6,” and discuss “working class” themes such as baseball, lumbago, and the need for tobacco.

*The Masque*'s representation of Indians was both a continuation of and an exception to the modes of “playing Indian” that took place in Wild West shows or in World's Fairs, both of which had begun to attract massive audiences well before the pageant movement began. Like the Wild West shows in which Indigenous performers “[observed] traditional spiritual and cultural practices, [and] simulated hunting, shooting, and fighting back,” the *Masque*'s red-face performers engaged in similar activities for an audience.<sup>[23]</sup> Like the 1904 World's Fair that took place in St. Louis, in which a model Indian school operated alongside a model ethnological village, the *Masque* aimed to articulate differences between “progressive Indians” and “primitive Indians.”<sup>[24]</sup> Unlike both the Wild West shows and the World's Fairs, however, no Indigenous performers appeared in the *Masque*. As such, the *Masque*'s Indians did not aim at authenticity and were not subjects of an anthropological gaze. Rather, they offered an example of red-face performance that wholly consumed and expelled the bodies of Indigenous persons in order to represent them as a collective symbol of a vanished past.

Mass masques like MacKaye's were spectacles that claimed to be anti-spectacle, and commercial enterprises that claimed to be anti-commercial. Defined as gatherings *of* the people and as events performed *by* the people (rather than as entertainments performed by paid professionals) the exclusion of Indigenous performers in pageants and masques was consistent with the contradictions inherent in an art form that sought to give shape to ideas of “the people” by excluding so many of them. To participate in a pageant not only meant “going native” but “becoming native,” in the sense of performing one's affective belonging to a place in which one was not born. Indigenous peoples stood apart from the structures of belonging that the pageants and masques offered to others because, being neither white nor able to become white, they could only ever be foreign.



Poster for *A Pageant of Progress* in Lawrence, Massachusetts (1911), courtesy of Dartmouth College Library, and “Sidelights on the Pageant.” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, May 29, 1914.

The Prelude to the *Masque* depicted an invented lamentation ritual of the Mississippian or “moundbuilding” peoples, the eleventh-century inhabitants of the middle Mississippi river valley known for their creation of colossal earthwork mounds. In MacKaye’s mass pantomime, the Moundbuilders performed ceremonial dances, acrobatic feats, and prayers in honor of a deceased leader. Employing a ritualized mode of “playing Indian,” the *Masque* offered spectators a demonstration of a self-governing civic body that supported both MacKaye’s theatrical vision and the SLPDA’s economic vision, a body that achieved physical excellence through ritual dances imitating the geometrical forms of the city’s sacred architecture.

Although few St. Louisans were familiar with them, MacKaye was so enchanted by his visit to the “Mounds” in nearby Cahokia, Illinois that he decided to recreate them in St. Louis’s Forest Park. The densely populated urban center of Mississippian culture, also called Cahokia, was composed of a vast central plaza, surrounded by mounds of differing geometrical shapes that may have corresponded to different civic functions.<sup>[25]</sup> The plan of this ancient city, with its monumental buildings, vast causeways, and interconnected plazas, correlated well with the city-of-the-future envisioned by the SLPDA. It also suited MacKaye’s goal, which was to imbue his *Masque* with classical values of form, beauty, and serenity.

Despite the depiction of Moundbuilder rituals in the *Globe-Democrat* cartoon, the participants in the

Prelude were not middle-aged men, but Boy Scouts and girls from local athletics clubs as well as young leaders of these organizations. Baker described the choreography of the scene: “Slowly and exquisitely, figures walking, swaying, dancing, filled the great stage [with] right arm extended before them and right knee raised high like figures in Assyrian *bas-reliefs*, [. . .] their bodies stained a yellow-brown.”<sup>[26]</sup> Ernest Harold Baynes added, “They represent the race at the very height of its civilization—a people beautiful of form and dress, lithe and graceful of movement, rejoicing in the strength and skill of their bodies which have been brought to a wonderful state of perfection.”<sup>[27]</sup> As described by Baker and Baynes, the athletic bodies of the *Masque’s* young performers provided the model material from which great civilizations may be built; moreover, their callisthenic acts confirmed that bodies can be “brought to perfection” through the performance of civic rituals such as the *Masque*.

The Moundbuilders’ tightly choreographed ritual, designed by Joseph Lindon Smith, demonstrated their ability to create complex patterns without the instruction of a visible leader.<sup>[28]</sup> Instead, their movements were directed by the geometrical motifs of the emblematic setting: the cubic altar, the circular shrine, and the pyramidal mounds. Photographs taken during rehearsal and in performance indicate that although both male and female Moundbuilders entered in winding lines imitating the shape of a river, the boys soon began to dance in a rectangular pattern around the center altar while the girls danced towards them, eventually forming circles on stage left and right. The men playing older priests arranged themselves symmetrically at the edges of the largest central mound, creating a triangle while younger boys imitated their elders by making human pyramids on top of the two smaller mounds at stage left and stage right. In Smith’s choreography, the Moundbuilders were represented as a people who have so thoroughly incorporated the architectural shapes surrounding them that they need no leader to guide their movements. They performed as a self-governing civic body, whose rational and efficient movements corresponded in every detail to the design of their city.



Moundbuilders rehearsing the Prelude, courtesy of Dartmouth College Library.

As the Moundbuilders’ ritual faded from the audience’s view, an enormous puppet called Cahokia was revealed sitting on the center mound. Waking from a long sleep, he explained to the audience that the preceding Prelude enacted his dreaming memory of the glorious city in which he was once a revered priest. Now, Cahokia lamented, his people have vanished. MacKaye lovingly called Cahokia “my Über-marionette.”<sup>[29]</sup> Although the convention of beginning a pageant with a soliloquy delivered by an Indian was already well-established, MacKaye’s decision to use a giant puppet was unusual. Cahokia’s majestic

presence not only underscored the extent of Edward Gordon Craig's influence upon MacKaye's ideas for reforming US theatre, it provided an aesthetic form through which MacKaye communicated his understanding of the relationship between the creative artist and the people in the socio-aesthetic work of pageantry.

MacKaye's profound reverence for Cahokia is unmistakable in numerous photographs that show him gazing up at the puppet and holding his hand. Conversely, photographs showing MacKaye rehearsing with actors tend to betray the posture of a stern disciplinarian. The different attitudes displayed in these photographs suggest that, for MacKaye, as for Craig, the human body was less suitable material for art than the Über-marionette. Unlike the "half-formed" people of St. Louis, who "provide[d] in themselves [the] creative material" for the poet-dramatist to shape and control, Cahokia's puppet-body was an already complete work of art exemplifying MacKaye's ideal civic body—his limbs, head, and hands moving in harmony with each other and with the music of the hidden orchestra.<sup>[30]</sup> MacKaye professed disagreement with Craig's idea to banish from the theatre all "the personal elements implied in the work of the actor."<sup>[31]</sup> However, his repeated descriptions of *Masque* participants as materials to be harmonized through performance suggest that MacKaye relished the opportunity to transform the individual bodies of St. Louisans as well as the civic body of St. Louis into works of art that might move with as much grace and precision as a puppet.



MacKaye holds Cahokia's hand. MacKaye directs Raymond Koch. Courtesy of Dartmouth College Library.

Although the Moundbuilders, like Cahokia, embodied physical perfection, they did not speak. Consequently, it was left to Cahokia to speak as the last member of his once-civilized tribe:

[. . .] Ai-ya, my people!  
Where are the tribes of Cahokia?  
Lo, where the trails of twilight  
Hide them, naked and scattered,

Luring them backward—backward  
Deeper in primal darkness,  
Masking with brutes, and mating  
In lairs of the jungle.[\[32\]](#)

With these lines Cahokia bewailed the de-evolution of his people into the beast-like Wild Nature Forces, a group of characters that allegorized all the allegedly savage Indigenous communities descended from the Moundbuilders. A brief glance at the text of Stevens's *Pageant* helps make this clear for its opening scenes trace the de-evolution of the Indian from a supposedly single, distinct culture (that of the Moundbuilders) to a passel of nomadic hordes whose degenerate habits are easily repelled, then reeducated through the heroic efforts of European colonists. In Stevens's *Pageant* the Osage and the Missouri are represented as homeless, cowardly thieves who survive by means of begging and stealing. Those St. Louisans who played Osage and Missouri in *Pageant* scenes were double-cast as Wild Nature Forces in the *Masque*.[\[33\]](#) MacKaye's stage directions indicate what has become of them: "*Below [Cahokia], mysterious, half-seen, at the foot of the mound—crouched on its sides and lurking in the dark background--brute-headed forms of the "Wild Nature Forces" move and mingle with glimmering limbs of savages.*"[\[34\]](#)

Recognizing the *Masque's* Indians as a representation of the city's rapidly expanding white working-class population, it becomes apparent that the transition from "playing Moundbuilders" to "playing Wild Nature Forces" signified a descent from civilization into savagery, and from culture into nature, that was resonant with contemporary fears about urban overcrowding and the corrupting influence of urban life. Like the denizens of modern cities, which sociologist E.A. Ross described as scenes of "mingling without fellowship and [. . .] contact without intercourse," of "wolfish struggle, crimes, frauds, exploitations and parasitism," the tribes of Cahokia, the puppet-priest explained, were lured away from their ancestral grounds.[\[35\]](#) No longer heeding Cahokia's prayers, the Wild Nature Forces began to obey gods of Chaos who urged them to give into their basest animal instincts towards lust, greed, and violence.

In all their aspects, the Wild Nature Forces illustrated the savagery of the modern city. Their movements consisted of lurking, crouching, crawling, mingling, mating, leaping, rushing and, unsurprisingly, crowding. Unlike the Moundbuilders, the Wild Nature Forces exhibited only groping, half-formed motions or rowdy, uncontrolled dancing. They gestured in multiple, arbitrary directions, all at the same time. They remained close to the ground where it was darkest and their shapes, which are described in the text of *Masque* as "half-seen" or "half-hidden," were indistinguishable from one another.

When the allegorical character named Saint Louis first entered the *Masque*, he appeared as a four-year-old boy, dragging behind him an immense sword that was too heavy for him to lift. Sensing his weakness, the Wild Nature Forces attacked the child, attempting to kidnap him. At the moment Saint Louis miraculously heaved the sword high above his head, the Wild Nature Forces suddenly froze, stunned into stasis and silence, "the beast faces [. . .] startled, glowering, murmurous."[\[36\]](#) Then, all at once, they "swarm[ed] down the mound sides, rush[ed] into the darkness and vanish[ed]."[\[37\]](#) Saint Louis's first victory in the *Masque* was one in which the mere appearance of a symbol of European conquest possessed the power to bring savage bodies to order and banish them from the stage.

Having cleared the stage of actual Indigenous persons, stage Indians, and allegorical Indian figures by the

end of the first act, the remainder of MacKaye's *Masque* followed the actions of an equally complex representation of the urban masses: the Pioneer. Like the Indian, the Pioneer was familiar from earlier public celebrations. Scenes of pioneers marching with the tools of their various trades or symbolically clearing the land in front of them with axes had been a staple of US civic parades since the eighteenth century.<sup>[38]</sup> Participants in such performances embodied the nation's pursuit of manifest destiny and the conquest of the frontier. In the *Masque of St. Louis*, however, the Pioneer was adapted to reflect twentieth-century concerns. Whereas the *Masque's* Moundbuilders illustrated a vanished preindustrial and proto-national collective subject, the Pioneers of the second act represented an emerging national and progressive collective subject, one that must repeatedly confront the problems of participatory democracy in an age of industrialization and mass immigration.

The first of the *Masque's* Pioneers entered a theatrical space from which the ritual center, the sacred altar fire of the Moundbuilders, had been removed. The only remaining light on stage emanated from the small shrine at the apex of the center mound. "Marching [forward] in widespread numbers" with spades, scythes, axes, and rifles, the *Masque's* Pioneers were unlike their eighteenth- and nineteenth-century forebears.<sup>[39]</sup> Carrying useless tools that clear no land, they presented themselves as lost and leaderless bands of men, desperately in search of a place to make camp or a direction in which to move. As if suddenly recognizing the urgent need for guidance, one Pioneer cried out: "Our trails blaze with desire and danger and hope born of to-day. For tomorrow is dim and yesterday—dead. Now lead us to-day! Lead us, St. Louis!" In unison the others echoed: "Lead us, St. Louis!" Emerging from a nearby shrine, Saint Louis suddenly appeared as a young knight clad in white armor with a brilliant white sword. The sword, as tall as the actor, animated the immense spaces of the pageant stage, directing the Pioneers onstage and the spectators' attention. From this scene onward, the Pioneers did not move or act unless directed to do so by Saint Louis and his sword.

As the *Masque's* promptbook reveals, the leaders of each of the three Pioneer groups were given typewritten sheets that explained where their groups should assemble and provided precise instructions for movement and choral speech. When read together, and in conjunction with the text of the *Masque*, they demonstrate the degree to which the Pioneers functioned as an automatic onstage audience, one formed by a reflexive, nearly involuntary instinct to applaud the actions of civic leaders.<sup>[40]</sup> Though the Pioneers were unable to move forward on their own, they were able to pledge their obedience to new leadership without hesitation. By performing spontaneous consensus and by demonstrating their willingness to be guided by familiar symbols of Anglo-European culture, the Pioneers provided an onstage model of the kind of civic responsiveness SLPDA members hoped St. Louisans would emulate offstage.

Throughout the *Masque's* Second Act, the Pioneers displayed their boundless energy. The prompt sheets instructed them to move swiftly from mound to mound and between various parts of the stage, often for no reason connected to the action of the scene.<sup>[41]</sup> Though their movement rarely indicated any achievement, it nevertheless performed the dynamism of modernity MacKaye sought to represent. Whereas the measured, ritualized group movement of the Moundbuilders expressed the rhythms of ancient, civilized collectivities, the velocity and urgency of the Pioneers' numerous flights across the stage expressed the rhythms of the modern city.

Though they did not represent a self-organizing collective body on the model of the Moundbuilders, the Pioneers were no less attuned to the necessity of precision, repetition, and rhythm in their collective

movements. Once they arrived at their appointed positions on the stage, their vocabulary of gestures was even more restricted than that of the Moundbuilders. Confined to gestures of deference and supplication, the prompt sheets instructed them to stand, half-kneel or kneel, to extend their arms up or out, and to point towards symbols as they appear on stage. Perhaps one of the only opportunities for creative self-expression came in the form of a repeated request, appearing in almost every prompt sheet, for the Pioneers to “make a great show of interest” through audible noises and visible gestures whenever any astonishing action occurred onstage. The Pioneers provided an onstage audience for the allegorical Saint Louis that was intended to serve as an exemplary model for the *Masque*'s actual audiences. Their prescribed range of movement suggests that in the *Masque*'s view, being an active participant in modern civic life meant being an appreciative and impressionable spectator. It meant performing one's patriotism by recognizing symbols, manifesting visible and audible signs of reverence for them, and agreeing to be led by those who employ them.



Saint Louis and the Sword, courtesy of Dartmouth College Library.

If MacKaye hoped that audiences would concentrate on the mass symbols and choreographies performed by their fellow citizens, the St. Louis press was more focused on the masses of spectators themselves. Local newspapers attempted to give readers an experience of the *Masque*'s scale by printing panoramic photographs of its audiences, which by the end of its run comprised more than a half-million individuals. Many more saw the *Pageant and Masque* during its week of rehearsals prior to opening day. The test of any pageant's success was the degree to which it could hold the attention of its vast crowds. As such, newspaper accounts remarked on the degree to which St. Louisans paid attention to an event that so many had presumed they could not understand. Spectators reportedly sat silent through sizzling summer days just to watch rehearsals, stood in the rain for many hours to gain access to the pageant grounds, and climbed dangerously high into trees to get the best viewing spots.

Sitting amongst the minority of spectators who paid for their seats, Baker described several of his co-spectators chattering through the Prelude. From his perspective, they chatter because they are leisure-seekers, unaware that they are participating in a civic ritual. Eventually, however, the *Masque* worked its magic; the group became quiet and still as the performance continued. Before they left, he explained, they turned back to look at the stage once more before silently walking away. For Baker, this transformation proved that the *Masque* had succeeded in sparking a moment of collective attention that might be mobilized for social purposes if repeated often enough.[\[42\]](#)

Despite Baker's insistence on its singular social and cultural significance, MacKaye's *Masque*, like so many previous civic entertainments, was absorbed into the urban spectacle it promised to transcend. Local papers reported everything from women overcome by heat, children lost in crowds, horses run astray, and water boys mobbed by thirsty spectators. Far from the ideal of civic enlightenment MacKaye describes in *The Civic Theatre*, spectators at one performance broke through seating barriers and caused a brawl. Rather than diverting attention away from the city's commercial entertainments, some members of the *Pageant and Masque*'s chorus performed onstage at one of the city's vaudeville houses immediately after an evening performance of the *Masque*.

Although the *Masque*'s critical and popular success was unsurpassed by any previous or subsequent event to emerge from the American Pageantry movement, its legacy remains fraught. On the one hand, the *Masque*'s success directly contributed to the passing of the charter, which in addition to its construction projects ensured stronger concentration of authority in the mayor's office, fewer elected and more appointed positions, and rezoning provisions that narrowed participation in the political process. On the other hand, it also led to the establishment of the St. Louis Municipal Opera Company, the expansion of St. Louis's public arts programs, and the construction of a permanent outdoor amphitheater in Forest Park.

Despite MacKaye's belief that large-scale participation in the *Masque* would encourage St. Louisans to work together for reforms that grew out of their own desires and imaginations, he misunderstood the extent to which the SLPDA's interpretation of the *Masque* as well as its definition of popular participation predetermined its potential social meanings. Luther Ely Smith, who saw the *Masque* as evidence of "the [same] civic spirit which will build our bridge, pass our charter, [and] stretch a plaza

from 12th Street to Grand Avenue” was but one of many voices echoing the official interpretation.<sup>[43]</sup> In the end, MacKaye’s *Masque* may have taught St. Louisans more about collectively performing towards the aspirations of its leaders, than about collective action or even collective dreaming. It stands as an unusual cultural experiment, and as a reminder that greater participation by citizens in the social and cultural work of performance neither equates nor necessarily leads to greater participation in official political processes. The work of coalition-building requires more sustainable performance practices than pageant-makers like MacKaye tended to have in mind. Acts of inclusion, when performed on a monumental scale, have the power to make a positive impact on communities, and even to instantiate processes of engagement, but their long-term efficacy depends on how they cultivate the meaning and the practice of collective participation before, during, and after the crowds go home.

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[1] George Pierce Baker, “The Pageant and Masque of St. Louis.” *World’s Work*, vol. 28 (Aug 1914), 389. Though known primarily for pioneering the study of playwriting in the United States, Baker was a prominent advocate of pageantry as well as a pageant writer and director.

[2] Thomas Dickinson, *Playwrights of the New American Theater* (New York: MacMillan, 1925), 19. Despite his lack of popular success, Dickinson and others considered MacKaye one of the most important playwrights of his day. His most well-known plays are *The Canterbury Pilgrims* (1903), *Jeanne d’Arc* (1906), *Sappho and Phaon* (1907), *The Scarecrow* (1911), and *Yankee Fantasies* (1912).

[3] Directly quoting Craig’s *On the Art of the Theatre* (1912) in his own book, MacKaye described realism as “the blunt statement of life, something everybody misunderstands while recognizing,” (Percy MacKaye, *The Civic Theatre in Relation to the Redemption of Leisure*. New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1912: 28). Despite their occasional disagreements, MacKaye and Craig were lifelong friends and correspondents. On their relationship, see Susan Valeria Harris Smith, *Masks in Modern Drama* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1984): 49-84.

[4] Percy MacKaye, quoted in Joyce Kilmer, *Literature in the Making, By Some of its Makers* (New York: Harper, 1917), 314.

[5] Letter from Percy MacKaye to Grenville Vernon, March 12, 1907, courtesy of Dartmouth College Library. MacKaye’s work in the masque genre predated the rise of the pageantry movement. The *Saint-Gaudens Masque*, performed at the Cornish Art Colony in 1905, was MacKaye’s first critical success. His first pageant was performed at Gloucester, Massachusetts in August 1909 and, though it never materialized, he developed a pageant for Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1910. After *The Masque of St. Louis* MacKaye created his most well-known and most often studied masque, *Caliban by the Yellow Sands*, based on Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. It was produced both in New York and Boston in 1916. MacKaye remained a member of the American Pageantry Association’s Board of Directors until its dissolution in 1930.

[6] David Glassberg's *American Pageantry: the Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990) currently serves as the starting point for scholarship on MacKaye's *Masque*. Two dissertations also consider the event in some detail from different perspectives: Kenneth Graeme Bryant, "Percy MacKaye and the Drama of Democracy," (PhD diss., Univ. of Nebraska, Lincoln, 1991), ProQuest AAT 9200131, and Michael Peter Mehler, "Percy MacKaye: Spatial Formations of a National Character," (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2010), ProQuest AAT 3417299.

[7] A bibliography of contemporary works on American pageantry can be found in Caroline Hill Davis, *Pageants in Great Britain and the United States: a List of References* (New York: New York Public Library Association, 1916). The American Pageant Association (APA), founded in 1913, was organized for the purposes of protecting the new genre from commercialization, disorganization, and low aesthetic standards. Its founding and development is discussed in Naima Prevots, *American Pageantry: a Movement for Art and Democracy* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1990).

[8] For examples of the variety of forms that current pageant scholarship takes, see the following: Karen Blair, "Pageantry for Women's Rights: The Career of Hazel MacKaye, 1913-1923," *Theatre Survey*, Vol. 31, no. 1: 23-46; Brook Davis, "Let the children speak: The 'Pageant of Sunshine and Shadow,' a child labor pageant by Constance D'Arcy Mackay," *Theatre Studies*, 1997, Vol. 4: 33-44; Brian Hallstoos, "Pageant and Passion: Willa Saunders Jones and Early Black Sacred Drama in Chicago," *Journal of American Drama and Theatre*, 2007, Vol. 19, no. 2: 77-97; Hannah Hammond, "A Masque on Behalf of the Birds," *New England Theatre Journal*, Vol. 27: 41-62; Jenna L. Kubly, "Staging the Great War in the National Red Cross Pageant," *Journal of American Drama and Theatre*, 2012, Vol. 24, no. 2: 49-66.

[9] Percy MacKaye, *The Civic Theatre in Relation to the Redemption of Leisure*, 30-31. In *The Civic Theatre* MacKaye draws heavily on Jane Addams's *Spirit of Youth and the City Streets* (1909) and Michael D. Davis' *Exploitation of Pleasure* (1911) for support for his ideas. See also, George Elliott Howard, "Social Psychology of the Spectator," *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 18, No. 1 (July 1912): 37-41.

[10] Percy MacKaye, "On the Need of Imagination in the Drama of To-day," *Harvard Advocate*, vol. 63, no. 10 (June 30, 1897): 140.

[11] Luther Gulick, quoted in Glassberg, *American Pageantry*, 199.

[12] Percy MacKaye, *Saint Louis: A Civic Masque* (New York: Doubleday, 1914), xi-xii.

[13] Anne Throop Craig, "Pageantry," *Encyclopedia Americana* (Encyclopedia Americana Co., 1919): 101.

[14] Percy MacKaye, "Worcester Address on Pageantry," February 26, 1912, courtesy of Dartmouth College Library; MacKaye, *Saint Louis*, xiv.

[15] MacKaye, *Saint Louis*, x.

[16] *Ibid.*, xvi-xix.

[17] Tara Zahra, *The Great Departure: Mass Migration from Eastern Europe and the Making of the Free World* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016), 4. For demographic data see *The Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910: Statistics for Missouri*, 602-622.

[18] My description of the casting process is based on Glassberg, 178-181, and upon documents in the Dartmouth College Library.

[19] Alessandra Lorini, *Rituals of Race: American Public Culture and the Search for Racial Democracy* (Charlottesville: Virginia University Press, 1999), 236-243.

[20] Glassberg, *American Pageantry*, 178; Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 5.

[21] MacKaye, *Saint Louis*, xix.

[22] Shari Huhndorf, *Going Native* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001): 3, 14.

[23] Rosemarie K. Bank, "Show Indians/Showing Indians: Buffalo Bill's Wild West, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and American Anthropology," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, vol. 26 (Fall 2011): 152.

[24] L.G. Moses, "Indians on the Midway: Wild West Shows and the Indian Bureau at the World's Fairs, 1893-1904," *South Dakota History*, vol. 21 (Fall 1991): 24.

[25] Sally A. Kitt Chapel, *Cahokia: Mirror of the Cosmos* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 142-145.

[26] Baker, 391.

[27] Ernest Harold Baynes, "The Biggest Show Ever Staged," *Boston Evening Transcript*, undated, courtesy of Dartmouth College Library.

[28] Joseph Lindon Smith was a painter known primarily for the skill with which he recreated ancient artifacts discovered on archaeological expeditions in Egypt. My description of his choreography for the Prelude is based on more than fifty rehearsal and performance photographs in the Dartmouth College Library, as well as dozens of newspaper accounts from MacKaye's scrapbook on the *Masque*, also in the Dartmouth College Library.

[29] MacKaye wrote this on the back of a photograph of Cahokia in the PMK Papers. Edward Gordon Craig explains his theory of the Über-marionette in *On the Art of the Theatre* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2008), 54-94. Both Robert Edmond Jones and Thomas Dickinson regarded the *Masque* as the only theatrical work to successfully explore the possibilities of the Über-marionette on the US stage.

[30] MacKaye, *Saint Louis*, x.

[31] MacKaye, *The Civic Theatre* (fn.), 27.

[32] MacKaye, *Saint Louis*, 7-8.

[33] *Program of the Pageant and Masque of St. Louis*, PMK Papers.

[34] MacKaye, *Saint Louis*, 5.

[35] Edward Alsworth Ross, *Social Control: A Survey of the Foundations of Order* (New York: MacMillan, 1901), 19. Highly influential during his lifetime (1866-1951), Ross wrote twenty-seven books and over 300 articles on social psychology, history, and urban reform.

[36] MacKaye, *Saint Louis*, 22.

[37] Ibid.

[38] See, for examples, Susan G. Davis, *Parades and Power: Street Theater in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1986), David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: the Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1997), and Simon P. Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

[39] MacKaye, *Saint Louis*, 42.

[40] Promptbook of *The Masque of St. Louis*, courtesy of Dartmouth College Library.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Baker, 391.

[43] Luther Ely Smith, "Pageant to Make City Better Place to Live In," *Bulletin of the Pageant and Masque of Saint Louis*, No. 2: 7.



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