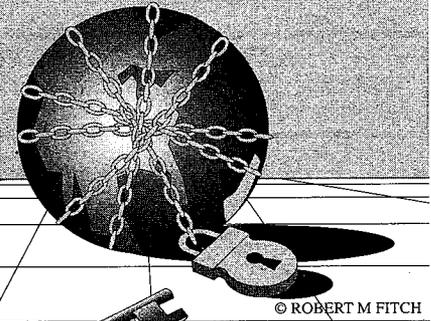


# GROUND SWELL

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## HOW LAND VALUE TAX WOULD REVITALIZE THE EAST ST. LOUIS WATERFRONT

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(This power point presentation was made at the conference of the Council of Georgist Organizations July 28, 2018, in O'Fallon, IL. The following transcript of his presentation was done by your GroundSwell editor. Prof Theising is the Chair of the Political Science Dept. at Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville, IL. Prof. Theising may be emailed at [atheisi@siue.edu](mailto:atheisi@siue.edu)

Welcome to St. Louis. I have spent the last 25 years studying a part of this region that has struggled. East St. Louis, IL is a failing city by just about any measure that you can think of, economically, socially, crime rate – whatever statistic you can come up with, East St. Louis is struggling in that category. It is not something new in East St. Louis. It has struggled for generations.

I want to talk about East St. Louis today. I was on a plane trip and I was looking out the window as we were leaving St. Louis and we were flying over the river with St. Louis on the west side and East St. Louis over on the east side. My first thought from 2000 feet up was East St. Louis looks deceptively green and tranquil, but that is not the reality at street level. After that I wanted to capture that in a picture and then I started looking at how the market treated the west side of the river and then how the market has treated the east side of the river. There is hardly an undeveloped block over here but look at all the green space and open space on the east side.

I was wondering what was happening and I thought after being invited to speak here at this conference, let's look at just this study area between the two bridges, the Eads bridge and what is called the Poplar Street bridge which has multiple formal names (but everybody just calls it the Poplar Street bridge). Let's look at what is happening at that land between the bridges. I think it is illustrative of some larger issues. So, in this study area you are looking west and the Poplar Street bridge is to the left and the Eads bridge is to your right; it is one of the best views of the lovely St. Louis skyline and the Gateway arch. It is a fantastic view. This land has seemingly should have tremendous value. We are in this age of tourism now where cities attract tourists. In

academics we don't necessarily think of tourism as amusement and good times but people who travel for a purpose. It could be for amusement but it could also be for business or for other purposes. But they intend to stay overnight. Tourism is the direction that cities have been going for a long time and this land has high potential for that. If you go up in the Gateway Arch and look at our study area this is what you see.

Now we look at the east, the Eads bridge is on the left and the Poplar Street bridge is on our right. There is not a lot of high value land use going on right here at the riverfront. But if you look at other cities, if you go to Covington, KY, which is a place a lot like East St. Louis, if you go to Gary, Indiana, you actually see stronger development there than you see in places like East St. Louis, even though east and west has a very similar experience to Gary, Indiana and Covington, KY and Camden, NJ.

So, I will give you a little bit of a history lesson. We go back to the very beginning, way back to the late 1700s when Captain Piggott comes to the East St. Louis area. He is a Revolutionary War officer and came here on military assignment and was a friend of George Washington. He bought some of the Illinois floodplain that includes this study area between the bridges that we are looking at that includes the area between the two bridges in the present day East St. Louis. That area at the river was actually separated from the rest of the land by a rather substantial creek that ran through there called Cahokia Creek. He built the first bridge over Cahokia Creek. That connected his land on the riverfront with the rest of the floodplain which had connections with the bluffs where the population and urban centers were.

So, in 1795 he goes across the river, and you got to remember this was still a Spanish colony in Missouri in 1795, and he gets perpetual license to run a ferry operation across the Mississippi River between St. Louis and Illinois. He built a bridge, he sets up a ferry operation, he gets his license and then he dies in 1799 just a few years after he does this. Here is the only known picture of his work and you can see that the Cahokia Creek was a rather large body of water and it was a rather substantial bridge that he built across it and then from there now we head down the Mississippi River to take this ferry across the water.

(continued on p. 12)