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Coming to any city as a tourist, a main concern is always how to get around in a new, unfamiliar place. This means trying to navigate the public transportation system, whether it is buses, streetcars, trolleys, trains, or subways. These particular experiences from my first time in New Orleans and Tokyo really illustrated the unique qualities of the cities and their cultures. Each major city has its own transportation system, with its own quirks. Both New Orleans and Tokyo have many different sites to see around their respective cities. To get the whole experience, and to see the significant sites in the city, you must find a way to get around. New Orleans is based in its rich history and traditions that have been produced by a mix of many nationalities and cultures throughout the last hundreds of years. On the other hand, Tokyo is constantly changing, adapting, and rebuilding. It is a continually new city, always looking towards the future. In many ways, the public transportation systems of these two cities highlight the two hugely different modes of existence adopted by Tokyo and New Orleans.

My first experience with New Orleans transportation came with the first day that I came to the city. Despite knowing little about the city I would spend the next years of my life in, I was aware of the classic New Orleans streetcar. It is one of the defining features of the city, made famous through historic movies and literature. It is even the title of the popular Tennessee Williams' play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*. In fact, everything I knew about New Orleans before moving there was the historical places that make up the city. I knew of the French Quarter, and I had seen pictures of the St. Louis Cathedral. I had heard New Orleans jazz.

On my first streetcar ride, I experienced exactly how a city that cherishes and struggles with its history functions. After finding the nearest stop on the St. Charles streetcar line, I walked the few blocks through the historic warehouse district to the stop at Julia and St. Charles. The streetcar line has few amenities, with most stops simply having a sign to mark their existence. The 30 minute wait for the streetcar to arrive went by quickly while I was soaked in the culture of this new city. Once on the streetcar, the ride was slow due to the frequent stops for riders and red lights. While tourists enjoy riding on the historic street car that moves slow enough to take in the beautiful surroundings that are New Orleans, it is an inefficient mode of transportation.

The New Orleans streetcar has struggled to stay alive in the city, with only a few lines still existing. When first built, the dozens of lines provided transportation to the inhabitants of New Orleans. Following a reduction in use and damage of infrastructure post-Katrina, the city now only runs the lines in the most 'touristy' areas of New Orleans. In fact, my first impression of the streetcar wasn't what I had experienced with other city-wide transportation systems. It was an experience of travelling back in time to the bustling days of New Orleans in the early 1900's. It was not the experience of using an important lifeline that keeps the machinery of the city working properly, such as the subways in New York, the Metro in Paris, and the L in Chicago. New Orleans is a city always living in its past.

When traveling to Japan, I had also heard about its transportation system. I had heard of its effectiveness and the bullet trains that can rapidly move from city to city. While also world-renowned like the streetcar in New Orleans, the transportation in Japan is known for its 'futuristic' qualities, not its historic, antique qualities. To me, Tokyo was a gleaming 21<sup>st</sup> century city. I had seen photos of its expansive skyline with soaring skyscrapers. I knew of the huge population and density that makes up the city. When thinking of Tokyo, I thought of new

technology, sleek design and the electronic sounds of J-Pop. In short, I thought of the complete opposite of New Orleans.

My first trip on the train system in Tokyo enforced the idea of a highly efficient, yet hectic and crowded city. On the way to the hotel from the airport, I was amazed by the seemingly chaotic interlacing lines that got us quickly to the other side of the city. While hectic for a first-timer, being able to move efficiently from one side of Tokyo to the other without an automobile was a new experience for me. Later on, I would experience the masses of people that move through each train station at any given moment. The seas of people were overwhelming, but also comforting. Everyone was using this public system to keep the city running. There was very much a sense of community and common effort.

The little things from this first trip on the Tokyo subway really highlighted the fact that it is a transportation system essential to the function and performance of the city. The subway cards that we used to pay for each trip with a simple 'tap' at the subway entrance were a world apart from the normal scramble to find a quarter to complete the \$1.25 streetcar fare. The trains either run above or below the surface traffic, making the ride faster and more convenient. At the many transfers we had to make that first night, the next train would arrive in a couple of minutes. Compare this to the 30 minute wait I experienced on my first streetcar ride. The crisscrossing, unorganized subway lines implied a system that has been continually expanding and organically growing as the city grows. Unlike New Orleans where the grid of streetcar lines has been diminished to a small fraction of its former expanse, the Tokyo subways has been improved and expanded to keep up with the city. It is clear that the subway is essential to Tokyo. Without the subways, the massive and dense city could function to the same degree.

While the public transit systems aren't complete analogies for their respective cities, they stress the major differences of Tokyo and New Orleans. New Orleans is a city bound to its past (it is economically bound by the large tourism industry). It preserves the places and things that have been there for years, despite their problems and ineffectiveness. Tokyo is a city forever moving towards the city. It disregards most of its historical spots, to create room for new and improved structures. These cities lie on the extremes of historic preservation, with positives and negatives to both positions.

