Railroads and Collectivization in the West: Four Sketches of Technology, Greed, and Life on the Frontier

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Preface

Railroads are not, of course, an American invention. They began and were first proven in England, but quickly made their way to America. Although many saw the potential of railroads, few had a clear conception of how American railroads should be built. Rather than focus on the personalities involved in the birth of American rails, Chapter 1 discusses the uniquely American application of this portentous technology and how the new railroad network — directed by markets and technology — helped shape the nation.

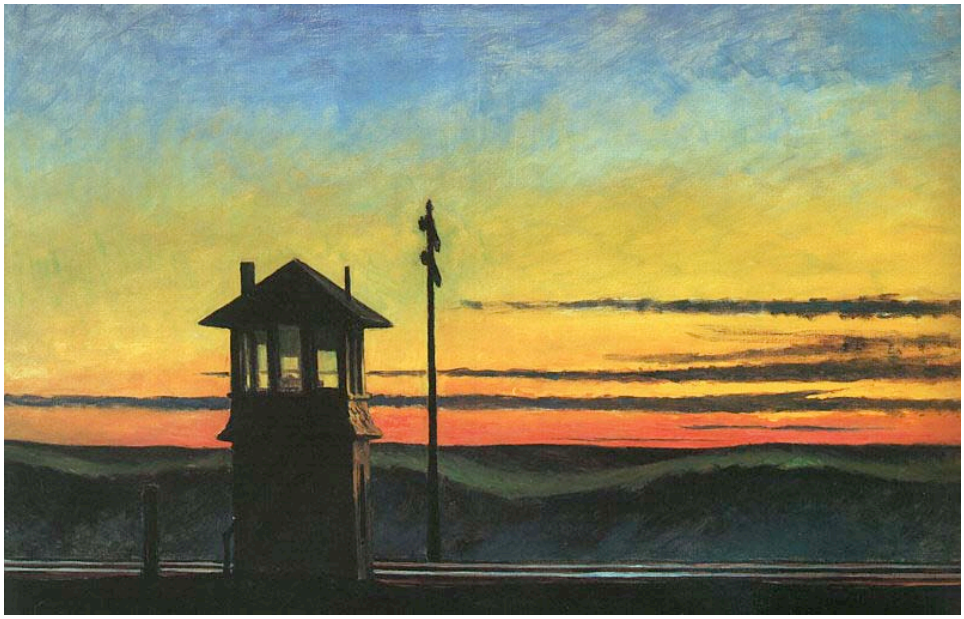
Most of America was eagerly welcoming the railroad and its new technology, but much of the young nation was still cut off from the deeply interconnected coasts by chance or choice. Chapter 2 provides a narrative of the drive to bridge the gap and bring commerce and connectivity to everyone through the microcosm of the Mormon experience: how the transcontinental's allure won over and transformed the persecuted and isolationist Mormons.

While the new national railroad brought the nation together, many groups felt that the railroad was another tool of exploitation and oppression. The railroad created a counter-offensive against the might of the wealthy in organization of the poor and destitute, who could then use their collective powers to challenge their would-be oppressors. Chapter 3 shows how the transcontinental railroad created two such collectivization movements: ZCMI in Utah and the Pullman Company in Illinois.

The final chapter, Chapter 4, discusses how the excesses of the period played out in the court of public opinion. The media of the period, however, was much more personality oriented (or at least more openly so) than today, and the stories are more often those of author and his foe. We have an interesting perspective,

since we have an opportunity to examine the activities of railroad baron Collis P. Huntington as a purveyor of populist-minded slander and — at the adept hands of Ambrose Bierce, no less — as a recipient.

This was prepared for H 97, Caltech's "Junior Thesis" tutorial for history majors during the 2002-2003 academic year under the direction of Professor William Deverell. It is divided into three slightly unequal sections, each of which can be read independently. They are arranged in a fashion the roughly corresponds to the overall historical timeline and the order in which they were written. I'd like to thank Dr. Deverell for his patience, book loans, and nearly infinite suggestions for further books to examine; Toni Boyd and Gillian Pierce for assisting with editing; and Kally Pan for commiserating over the plight of history majors at Caltech.



Railroad Sunset Edward Hopper, 1929

Chapter 1

Innovation and a Changing America

On a summer day in 1831, passengers aboard the Mohawk and Hudson railway emerged from their train shaken and confused. At the start of the 17–mile trip from Albany to Schenectady, the engine used to jerk the train up the inclined plane threw sparks as it pulled the cars upward until they were high enough off ground level to release the train along its course. These respectable men and women, who had attempted — in vain — to use their umbrellas as shields against the thrown embers, were not part of America's first railroad disaster. By all accounts, this was a remarkably successful premiere of the first railroad traded on the New York Stock Exchange.

Forty years later, despite a civil war and anemic economic conditions, integrated railroad technology would be ubiquitous in every region in America. It seems incredible that such a coherent system should emerge so quickly, but America's unique solutions to the problems of railroading created a network that would quickly change the shape of American society. In 1825, early proponents envisioned railways as public roads, which would be used by private carts pulled by horses; there would be no centralized transportation or organization. Even John Stevens, who is revered as the man who popularized railways, envisioned an unbuildable elevated

track that would "at once render our frontiers on every side invulnerable[1]." Such curious depictions of railroads seem an unwise answer to America's transportation needs, but a reliable and efficient network quickly developed out of these vague and impractical beginnings.

The Character of Early American Railways

At the beginning of the 19^{th} century, American industrialists realized that they must develop the nation's transportation infrastructure if they wanted to develop industry within the growing American hinterland. Massive canal projects such as the Erie Canal were undertaken to conquer the current obstacle impeding westward expansion: the Appalachians. Even people invested heavily in waterborne transportation began to look for new ways to connect America. John Stevens, a former colonel in the US Army who had developed a steamboat at the same time as Fulton, argued for steam-powered rail systems in preference to canals; such a solution would allow for faster, cheaper connections that would scale more easily as more cargo needed to be conveyed. Proponents were bolstered by the success of British rail, but these fanciful claims still needed to be proven in the United States if the technology were to supplement — or supplant — the canal system. Since the only people who had any knowledge of railroads were the still inexperienced pioneers across the Atlantic, ambitious engineers went to Britain to absorb the lessons learned by the already operational railways in England. Since over 63% of American rail construction in the period before 1840 was overseen by men trained under the British, the first American railroads followed their conventions.

The initial lessons learned by the men experimenting with rails in England inevitably influenced the experience of those in America. Vertical boiler locomotives designed by George Stephenson and others used low pressure steam chambers and had a tendency to fall off the tracks because of their high center of mass. Thus, the first engineers laying out tracks in Britain sought to minimize the strain placed on the engines by avoiding steep grades and sharp turns. Through clever surveying and little compunction to spending massive amounts of investors' money on

[1][Stevens, 1815], p. 8

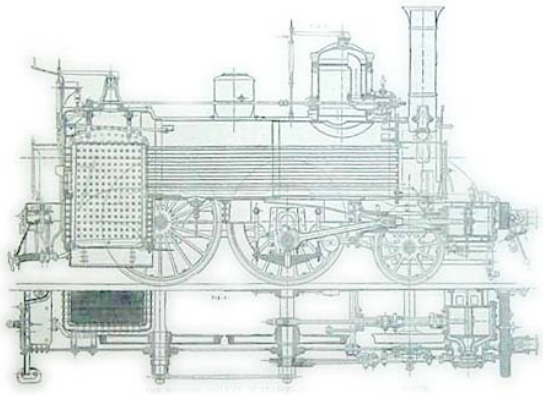


Figure 1.1: Diagram of steam engine assembly from the side (top) and bottom (bottom). The driving piston is to the far right hand side. [Bianculli, 2001]

infrastructure projects, this was an easy task in the relatively mild landscape of England.

The Baltimore and Ohio railroad, which sought to compete with Pittsburgh's growing inland connections, emulated the Liverpool and Manchester Railroad's construction style, creating expensive bridges and viaducts, avoiding steep grades, and concentrating elevation changes in a single location. But necessity eventually proved that American engines, which were initially viewed as inferior to their older and more respected British counterparts, could handle sharper turns and climbs than were attempted on cash-flush British railroads, turning what were thought to be impossibilities into commonplace features of the American railroads. These technological innovations induced by America's relative poverty would not only redefine the world's concept of a railroad but also the fabric of the American economy.

Homegrown Solutions to American Problems

The first innovation that allowed American engines to handle the steep grades of American rail was ground seams, which strengthened the joints of the engine's steam chamber. Every steam engine must have a very strong chamber that can hold the steam generated from boiling water (see Figure 1.1). This steam in turn drives a

turbine or a piston to generate thrust. If the chamber can handle higher pressure, it can exert more thrust and thus navigate steeper grades. It was not the strength of the metal that kept the trains from achieving higher pressure; the weakness lay in the joints between the iron plates, which were packed with canvas and tar and required constant attention. The Baldwin Works in Philadelphia developed a new method of grinding the seams to a smooth finish, thus allowing the riveted plates to hold fast to each other without canvas. In 1834, the performance of the first engine using this technique — Philadelphia and Columbia's *Lancaster* — was one of the primary reasons that the American Railroad Journal recommended American engines over British[2]. These new engines could comfortably handle pressures of 120 psi, while earlier models topped out at 70 psi.

This technique made engines faster and more powerful, but America's irregular track laid by novice engineers on unyielding terrain was still too hazardous to traverse quickly. As engines became more powerful, they increased in size and could not navigate turns as well as their smaller, less powerful progenitors. But this difficulty in increasing scale was indirectly resolved as another problem unique to America was solved: unfenced livestock and large wildlife falling under the wheels of a locomotive and derailing the train. The solution to the immediate problem came first, but the first cowcatchers were essentially cars strapped to the front of the locomotive. Engineers realized, however, that such a device needed to either be massive enough by itself to impart enough momentum to dislodge an obstacle on the track or be connected strongly enough to the already massive locomotive to impart the requisite momentum.

The second option was obviously preferable, and pilots such as the one seen on the Camden and Amboy's John Bull became the popular solution (see Figure 1.2) soon after the engine went into operation in 1831. It was fused to the front of the engine, but its wheels had to independently follow the path of the rails on turns. These pilots had the added advantage of leading the locomotive around the track during turns, which gave the attachment its name. With articulating wheels, engineers realized they could take corners faster than before, thus increasing efficiency while simultaneously protecting the train from collisions. It is difficult to

[2][Bianculli, 2001], p. 62

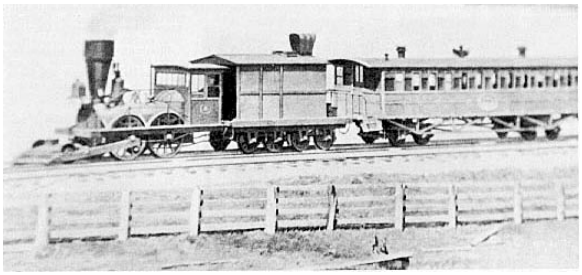


Figure 1.2: The John Bull and its leading "pilot," far left.

determine the first inventor of the idea, as it seems to have been the optimal solution to a problem that was fairly universal.

This technique was then brought into the design of the wheels on the engine itself. Here attribution is clearer, with West Point Foundry's *Experiment* by John Jervis featuring a 4-2-0 engine: an engine with four leading wheels, two driving wheels, and no tailing wheels. In 1836, the 4-4-0 George Washington further developed this idea and was the first engine to use a 4-4-0 wheel arrangement. The first major contribution to engine design outside Britain, this arrangement became known as the 'American' configuration. The United States now had engines that could comfortably handle the sharp turns of their rail, and even the British began using these engines on their expensive, labor-intensive straight tracks as their tracks began to age and become more like their American counterparts.

This pattern of American invention has been called innovation through poverty. While richer nations could live with spending more money to improve tracks and reduce grades, America sought technological workarounds on their engines. Eventually, however, these workarounds became benefits in themselves, and American railroad science moved further ahead. A more important development cited by contemporaries as the reason American engines were superior to European ones was the wheel equalizer.

When the engine moves over a raised imperfection in the track, the first wheel moves up slightly. This means that more weight is being placed on the leading wheel, applying more stress on an already weak spot in the track. In 1839, Joseph Harrison Jr., an engineer at the Garrett and Eastwick Philadelphia yards, developed a system

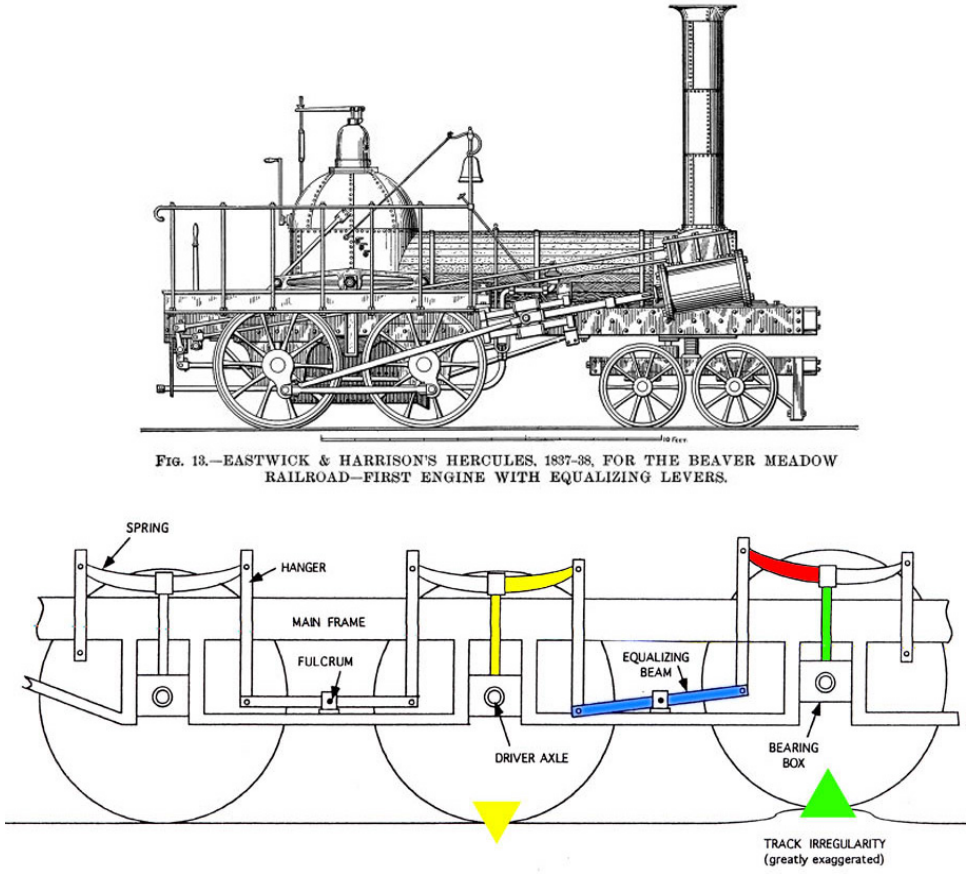


Figure 1.3: The wheel equalization system. a) A wheel encounters an imperfection in the track. b) The spring is pressed upward, lifting the equalizing lever. c) The weight is placed on the next wheel. [Bianculli, 2001]

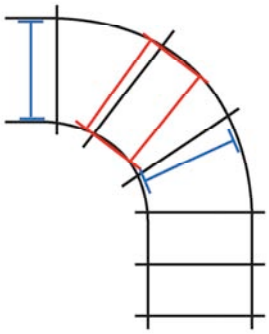


Figure 1.4: Maximum length of cars with fixed and articulating wheels.

which allowed a single wheel to rise and fall with the imperfections in the track. A spring is positioned above each wheel that allows the axle assembly to rise and fall with the track. The more important aspect of this invention was the mechanism for transferring the weight to the other wheels. As the displaced wheel is pushed upward, the spring on the top of the leading wheel pulls upward on a lever (see Figure 1.3) which compresses the spring for the next wheel, effectively diminishing the load put on the displaced wheel. Because the wheel yields to the surface of the track, the train is less likely to derail, the wear on the track is minimized, and the wheels can better grip the track.

Technology Deepens the Divide

These technological innovations, which were a product of the unwillingness of American railroad companies to spend money on infrastructure development, further influenced the peculiar character of the development of the American train. The maximum separation between axles on a railroad car is — if the wheels cannot independently turn — fixed by the maximum curve that the car will encounter. Since European cars rode on straighter tracks, they did not have articulating wheels. Thus the axles were closer together and the cars and compartments were smaller (see Figure 1.4).

Consequently, there was a greater separation between the riders in each car-

riage which resulted in stratification of passenger classes and passenger fears of being robbed or murdered alone in the isolated first-class compartments. The proletarian compartments, which were often uncovered, crowded, and unsanitary (but not secluded), were the refuge of frightened first class passengers after the 1861 murder of a French judge on a Paris-bound train[3]. American cars, however, did not have class distinctions until after the Civil War. American cars were not divided into sections, and the layout would be familiar to riders of subway cars today (for a comparison, see Figure 1.5). As described by a report commissioned by the House of Commons:

> The interior of the car forms a large room, with a passage, of from one foot nine inches to two feet wide, down the centre, upon each side of which cross seats are arranged. These seats are intended for two passengers each; they are from three feet three inches to three feet six inches long, about one foot six inches wide and one foot apart. The back is arranged to be turned, so that the passenger may sit with his face in either direction.[4]

Despite the fears of European rail passengers and the inability to communicate between cabins, the European railways chose not to adopt the American car for their lines. Because of the relatively longer length of trips in America, most of the luxuries which are often taken for granted on long travel were adapted from steamboats already serving the majority of American transportation needs. In addition, the design for the undercarriage support was borrowed from the structure of bridges to distribute the weight of these long land barges between the two wheels; both the idea and the implementation borrowed from waterway engineering.

Accustomed to the relative opulence of steamboats, Americans expected the amenities of hotels during travel: restrooms, beds, and full-service dining cars. Consequently, the American railroad industry made the experience of the trip as comfortable as possible, developing trains rather than lavishing resources on palatial train stations. As with earlier developments, the European pattern of investment focused on developing static endpoints while the American pattern focused on developing the train on the journey rather than the supporting infrastructure. America

[3][Schivelbusch, 1977], p. 72
[4][Galton, 1857], p. 15

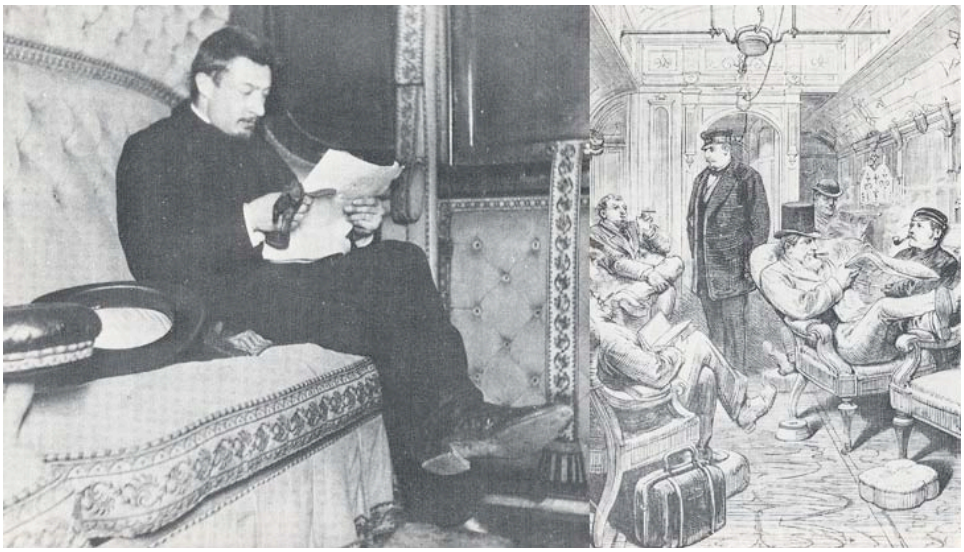


Figure 1.5: European 1^{st} class compartments (left) and American compartments (right) [Schivelbusch, 1977]

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established palatial lines between growing cities with spartan stations, while Europe built monuments of glass and steel within already established cities but serviced them with austere connections.

Because American railroads could spend less for comparable sections of track, small railroads with miniscule initial capitalizations could take bigger risks than European railroads, which could wager on only connections between established population centers. American railroads, on the other hand, created traffic rather than merely competing with established modes of transportation.

> Before the railroad was built, passenger traffic between [Charleston and Hamburg in South Carolina] had been adequately cared for by one stage-coach, which carried only six passengers without undue crowding and which made only three trips a week. During six months of operation in 1835 the railroad carried 15,959 passengers, the comparison in numbers per month being 50 travelers on the stage coaches as against 2,500 on the steam trains.[5]

[5] [Kinert, 1964]

Nor did the railroads immediately bring disaster for established means of transportation. The abundance of viable North South waterways such as the Atlantic coast and the Mississippi River served the interests of the early United States well, but as expansionist fervor and Manifest Destiny turned America's attention westward, railroads connected these well developed waterways, creating a spine for the preexisting ribcage as American travel took a more westerly character. Many Americans felt that God had given them a right to claim the continent, and railroads were the tool that most enabled the conquest.

How to Shrink a Continent

The development of this transportation system allowed the shifting of industry away from the traditional sources of raw material. The first railway constructed in America, the Granite Railway in Boston, was used as a means of transporting raw materials to make it easier to assemble them into finished goods, namely stones for a Bunker Hill monument. This initial emphasis on transporting goods, rather than on servicing passengers, had a greater demographic impact beyond facilitating greater transportation. Industries could select factory sites on the availability of labor rather than access to raw materials, which could now be transported without difficulty nearly anywhere once initial railroad lines had been constructed. This shift hastened the industrialization of inner city centers and the growth of large labor pools needed to support industrial production. By the same token, the land around a city suddenly became much closer to the city's center thanks to the contraction of space offered by the railroads. This changed the urban landscape, as "the epoch of the suburbs, of the amoebic proliferation of the formerly contained cities into the surrounding countryside[6]." Cheaper land unspoiled by rapidly accelerating urbanization suddenly allowed people willing to use the train for daily transportation an opportunity to live apart from the city while still working there.

This new technology allowed people to change the character in addition to the location of their lives. In 1867, J.B. Sutherland of Detroit developed a car with large ice tanks at either end. Along the top of the car, a shaft allowed air from outside to

[6][Schivelbusch, 1977], p. 35

run across the blocks of ice as the car moved along the tracks. This air, cooled from passing over the blocks of ice, was denser than the warmer air in the car and thus settled down into the car and expelled the warmer air from the car. This cheap and effective method of cooling food allowed the shipment of fresh meat and vegetables to large urban centers.

Before the advent of cheap refrigeration, only salted meat reached the cities. The small amount of fresh meat had to be carted in and slaughtered in the city where it would be consumed. Up until the Civil War, New York slaughtered more cows than any other city in America, thanks to its huge population and the insatiable demand for beef[7]. But refrigeration allowed livestock to be slaughtered closer to ranches, and New York's meat business quickly dried up. But this contraction of one urban business was matched by an explosion on the frontier. Chicago, which had become a mercantile hub with the opening of the canal between Lake Michigan and the Illinois River, was still little more than a backwater accretion for a sphere of merely a few hundred miles: the farmers of northern Illinois and Indiana. The unimpressive trickle of the Illinois River in the summer months, the sludge of the Spring thaw, and Lake Michigan's freeze in the Winter conspired to relegate Chicago only a sometimes transportation hub.

The opening of the Galena and Chicago Union, however, was well timed to give Chicago dominion over the transportation in the U.S. It opened at a time when water transportation — when available — was cheaper and more efficient than rail. Consequently, the new lines radiated out from the convenient harbor, Chicago. Trade in Chicago thus "became an exercise in regional transmutation[8]." Farmers chose Chicago because it was the most connected city with the Eastern markets and the cheapest source of manufactured goods; because raw materials were flowing into Chicago, manufacturers and more railroads followed. Chicago became the largest abattoir in the nation and the center of a transportation empire; all roads lead to Chicago (See Figure 1.6). During the 1840s and 1850s, Chicago's population and trade exploded, and the town went from a sleepy settlement to America's second city thanks to the railroad.

[7] [Hill, 1923], p. 253
[8] [Cronon, 1991], p. 63

The symbiotic growth of railroads creating towns which would then demand greater connectivity on the American frontier was not the only side-effect of the growth of railroads. Although the idea of the telegraph had been perfected at the beginning of the 19th century, there was no incentive to develop the technology on a large scale. The need for constant communication within the railroad network, however, forced engineers to develop the telegraph system into a coherent network that could keep each segment of the rail links aware of the situation immediately ahead of it. This approach is still used — with minor refinements — today. The rail network is divided into segments, and each signal tower communicates with the end of its segment to signal an approaching train if the length of track is clear[9]. This system was initially performed by lackeys posted on the tracks who flagged down trains but was quickly automated. This decreased the burden of engineers who could not always see blockages and oncoming trains and allowed tunnels to be traversed safely.

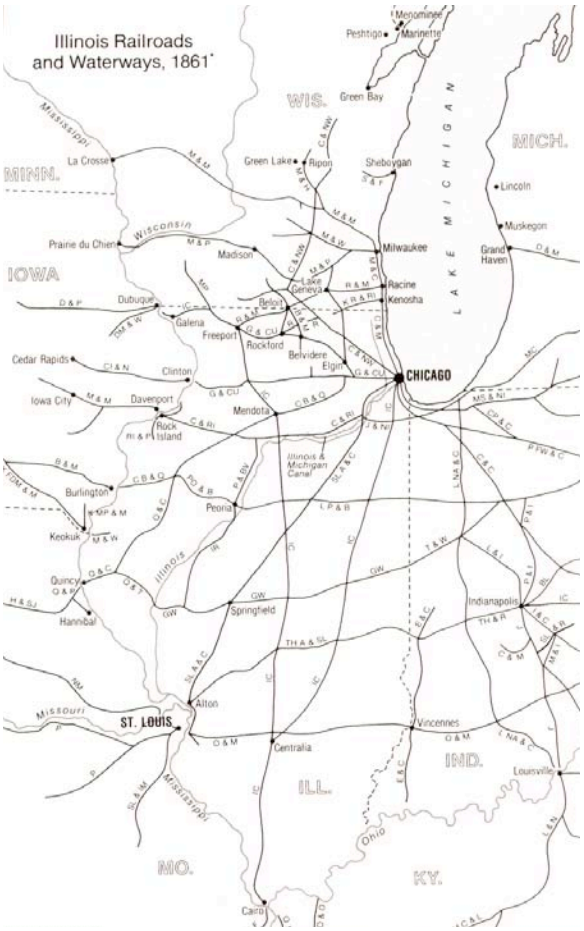

Figure 1.6: The nascent metropolis [Cronon, 1991].

[9][Schivelbusch, 1977], p. 30

Shaping the Future of America

Since telegraph wires had to be strung along the length of the railroad, the growth of railroads also gave us the first extensive intercity communication network. The first reliable and pervasive network of near-instantaneous communication was developed as an ancillary utility of a transportation system that became almost synonymous with the telegraph system. The U.S. Congress as late as 1864 was happy to conflate the two businesses, even though there was already some speciation[10]. The public also connected the entities, as most telegraph offices were located in train stations, and telegraph poles dotted each railway route.

The growth of the railroad shaped the population of America and laid the foundation for our modern communication and transport networks. But the shape of the railroad could have been substantially different had the unique character of American railroads not emerged in the early 19^{th} century. If railroads followed the European patterns of massive infrastructure development and attention to minimizing the efforts of engines on the line, they would have merely been a mirror of the networks in Europe and expanded into the undeveloped West if the terrain were more pliant or more capital were available. Because the railroads had to be so inexpensive in America, there was less inertia to overcome in developing far-flung networks. Necessity forced American inventors to adapt established railroad technology to concentrate on sound rolling stock rather than on building infrastructure. This, along with America's innate expansionist leanings, encouraged connections to nascent towns rather than existing urban hubs, creating new population centers in the wake of the railroad. America's frugality, rough terrain, expansionist leanings, and scientific innovations developed a unique railroad system that in turn developed the American frontier, culminating the completion of the nation's transcontinental railroad.

[10] [Merriam, 1894], p. 185

Chapter 2

Linking America through Utah

As the impact of American railroads became obvious, the network was seen not just as regional utilities to supplement industry and trade, but as a national network that brought together the entire continent. Railroads began to become synonymous with the idea of American Manifest Destiny and began to focus on attaining and extending the ever-changing frontier. Through this diffusion, railroads connected communities that had long been isolated by geography, culture, or design. The transcontinental railroad linked not only California with the East, but also groups such as the Mormons with the rest of the world. The persecuted Mormons built the last lengths of the transcontinental railroad, and their experiences with the construction and later impact of the railroad serve as an exaggerated model for the railroad's impact on the rest of the United States.

While American expansionism certainly predated the appearance of railroads, their appearance only fueled and strengthened the drive for western expansion. By decreasing the apparent size of the United States, the far flung reaches of the Oregon and California were no longer quite as distant, even before Railroads were actually built.

> Railroads would, in the near future, bind the Pacific, the Mississippi Valley, and the Great Lakes in one iron clasp. They would bring congressmen from the Northwest coast to Washington in less time than it

had taken those who had come from Ohio a few years before.[1]

Moreover, existing railroads contracted existing settlement, thus ushering in increased urbanization and quickened settlement. This cold shower prompted another batch of colonists to trek toward the frontier before the slower pace of pre-railroad settlement would have done. The ensuing colonization pressure helped create the influx of colonists in Texas, which was in turn a fundamental spark for the Mexican-American War (1846-1848).

Expansionists Must Choose a Route

The idea of Manifest Destiny and building railroads to the West are so closely linked that private railroad builders begin using the same language to advance building lines within the present territory of the United States, in this case a railroad from Philadelphia to St. Louis: "the business of the West is within our reach, we can grasp and retain it with unerring certainty[2]." Only one year after Guadeloupe-Hidalgo and three years after the Oregon Treaty, the same spirit prompted early promoters such as Asa Whitney to speculate that massive railroads could be built to the West Coast (See Figure 2.1).

Despite widespread enthusiasm for a transcontinental railroad in an abstract sense, the devilish details continued to thwart those who would build the railroad. The most pressing questions were where the railroad would be laid and how the railroad would be funded. It was assumed that a private company would be the one to construct the railroad. The Department of War, headed by future CSA President Jefferson Davis, organized a massive surveying effort in 1854 to find the "best" route to the Pacific. The character of the polemic exploration, however, surpassed that of mere cartographic investigation. The study included meteorology, "zoology, and botany of the country, which enter into the question of the choice of routes, because they are indicative of the capacity of the country to sustain life and furnish materials for construction[3]."

[1] [Merk, 1966], p. 51
[2] [Roebling, 1847], 2
[3] [Davis, 1853], p. 1

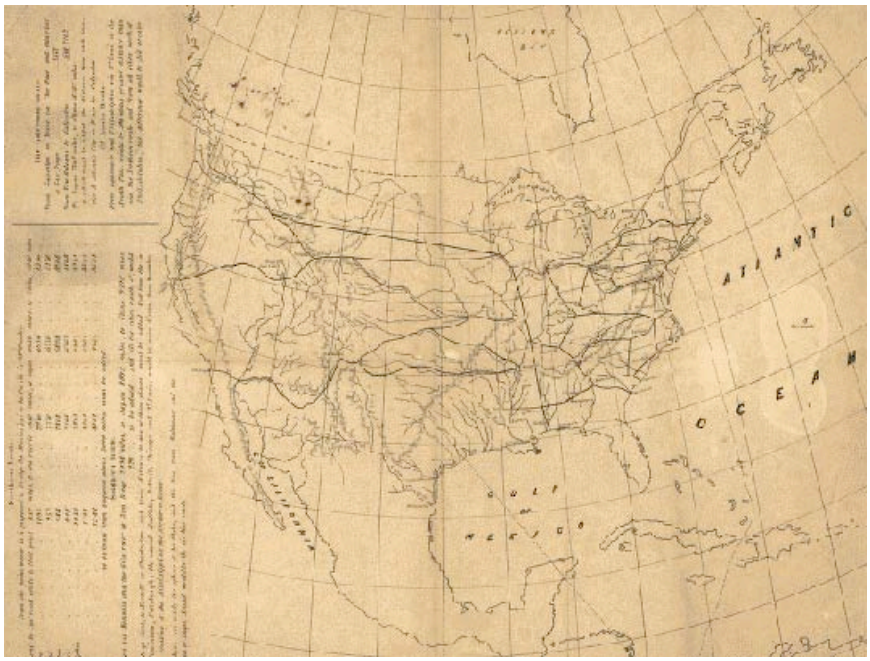

Figure 2.1: Charting a course to the West

Naturally, Davis favored the 35^{th} parallel route, which encountered fewer mountains and would connect with the Southern states, going so far as to fudge figures in order to favor the region[4]. The 47^{th} and 49^{th} parallel routes, which Whitney initially espoused, had to pass through the same mountains that would pass through more southerly routes, but would not connect to California, which was rapidly growing after the 1848 gold rush. The central 32^{nd} and 35^{th} routes also had the advantage of seeming to be a compromise, as well as some prominent backers. J.C. Frémont, who had searched for passes through the Rockies in his 3^{rd} expedition, wanted credit for "this one completing link to our national prosperity and the civilization of the world[5]."

Another factor that argued for the selection of the central route was the growing presence of the Mormons in Utah. After being driven out of Missouri and Illinois in 1848, the Mormons sought to form a utopia on the shores of The Great Salt Lake. Their presence encouraged the selection of the central route in a number of ways:

[4][Bain, 1999], p. 51
[5][Fremont, 1854], p. 7

as a population center between the Midwest and the West, as a source of labor, and as a possible source of trouble that needed to be brought under the control of the rest of the nation.

Even as the Mormons first settled Utah, Brigham Young was looking for railroad routes, and their ever-growing settlement was an attractive lure in terms of future business for the railroads. The 1850 census reported only 11,330 people in Utah territory; this number more than doubled in the space of three years, and soon reached 70,000 near the end of the 1850s[6]. While many of these newly settled residents were busily engaged in agriculture, many new immigrants from Britain were settling in the towns. The first major settlement west of the Rockies, the Mormons' fortuitous settlement at Parowan saved Frémont's ragged fourth expedition. Benton and Frémont, Benton's son-in-law, were friendly with the Mormons — Frémont had been one of the first to explore the region — and were probably thinking railroad connections would benefit them personally.

Friction with the Mormons

On the other hand, there were interests that wanted the selection of a railroad line in order to keep a closer eye on the dangerous Mormon settlers. The same agents that were causing Americans to look outward and expand were causing the Mormons to grow more isolated as the idea of a Mormon homeland became reality. No longer faced with outside pressure, the Latter-Day Saints became more comfortable creating an insular society in Utah that exerted the same pressure on non-Mormon gentiles that the Mormons themselves faced in Missouri and Illinois. The corresponding anti-Mormon sentiment was especially strong after the 1857 "Mormon War" and the Mountain Meadows Massacre. Part of the reason bloodshed was averted was that forces from Fort Leavenworth were delayed in leaving and further delayed en route. Before the troops could be seriously resisted by the Mormons, an agreement was reached to allow the establishment of a military base and the installation of Governor Cumming. If a transcontinental line were to go through Utah, the logistical concerns of mounting a sizeable force against Utah would be less daunting, and a

[6][Arrington, 1992], p. 141

swifter response to treasonous activities could be made. But Utah seemed relatively unhelpful in helping the construction of the railroad. After Gunnison (the ill-fated expedition Freémont chose to replicate) was murdered by Indians, Mormon agents were reticent to track down the killers, allowed them to escape once apprehended, and warned their tribesmen of retaliation by the army[7].

While the central route was a partial compromise toward the Southern route, sectional bickering and eventually the civil war prevented significant progress until the 1862 Curtis bill, which later morphed into what would become the form for the transcontinental railroad: two lines, one emerging from Sacramento working eastward and one from Omaha working westward. With dissent from the South silenced after 1861, the choices were only between the northern and central routes. In addition to the reasons already listed for the central route, California railroad builder Theodore Judah had breached the Sierra-Nevada range, a looming obstacle for the transcontinental. His dogged lobbying and continued efforts from the West sealed the selection of the central route.

But interesting developments in Utah created a different response to the nascent railroad. Rather than the civil disobedience that thwarted Gunnison's 1854 expedition, the Church — Brigham Young in particular — was now friendly to the idea of a railroad being built through Utah with Mormon assistance. The Mormon isolation was beginning to give way to a desire for measured, incremental contact with the rest of the United States. Brigham Young's "Iron Mission," reminiscent of a Stalinist five year plan, had failed to develop heavy industry in Utah, grasshopper plagues in 1868 had destroyed any hope of recovering from three years of drought, and the Civil War had demonstrated America's willingness to suppress internal division at any cost. Buchanan, who had avoided antagonizing the South at any cost had still been willing to risk outright war with Utah in 1857; how would a more dynamic president respond to internal dissent? Indeed, the question of slavery had been inextricably linked to that of polygamy[8]. Much to the disgust of the South, the Mormons managed to frame the issue as one of popular sovereignty; in reaction, the Republican Party incorporated anti-polygamy rhetoric into the anti-slavery platform. With the Republicans firmly in control during reconstruction, Utah must either play along

[7] [Anderson, 1942], p. 152
[8] [Anderson, 1942], 166

or risk open conflict again with a nation inured to sectional conflict and a massive standing army.

Convincing the Mormons to Play Along

So when Thomas Durant of the Union Pacific approached Young to contract Mormon workers, the patriarch accepted. In what Young considered a good move at the time, he did not work very hard to secure higher wages for prospective Mormon workers. Since the Mormon workers were paid at lower wages, there was less incentive for outsiders to enter Utah for work, thus preventing the appearance of the "Hells on Wheels" - the peripatetic brothels and gambling dens that followed the gangs elsewhere.

> Men should not look for the wages that were made here in 1864 and 1865. The days for such prices to be paid are long gone, and it would be beneficial that they never return such high rates of wages benefit neither the employer nor the employee. They only foster extravagance and other bad habits.[9]

Yet Young's multi-faceted roles in the community began to lead to confusion. Earlier attempts by the federal government to limit the temporal power of the church forced the holdings and resources of the church to become blurred with the president's personal property. Thus, when Brigham Young, the foremost citizen of Utah, entered into these contracts with the railroads and guaranteed wages to subcontractors, he was simultaneously tying the fate of the railroad with that to the Latter-Day Saints.

At first, this scheme seemed a boon to the church; Leland Stanford soon entered into a bidding war against Durant, exploiting the government's land grant system to finance the railroad. The idea of the land grants had always been tied into expansion into the West since Stephen Douglas secured a grant for the Illinois Central to connect Eastern interests of the Great Lakes to the growing Chicago, and Plumbe described a system to grant alternating land on each side of a transcontinental

[9][Cannon, 1868], May 1868, quoted in [Verdoia, 2002]

road[10]. Although land grants were initially from states, the difficulty of interstate projects became obvious in the effort to link Chicago and Mobile; individual states were dealt with for smaller scale projects, but once the initial constitutional objects were settled, the land grant process was logically extended to organizations whose mandate extended across several states.

This extension worked well for single projects, but since this undertaking was a two-pronged effort, interesting effects were seen at the junction of the two branches. Judah was encouraged to build as quickly as possible across Nevada to reach Utah and then enter into a race against his competitors. Despite Young's promises to the Durant and Stanford that "all the hands you want[11]" would be available, both wanted preferential treatment. Additionally, there was a significant portion of redundant grading and track completed to secure additional land grant money; since the land grant applied to the section of the track completed by the railroad.

Disillusionment with the Railroads

Since the railroads' graders had passed each other in early 1869, some compromise was needed to resolve the issue of where the two lines would meet. Huntington, who represented the interests of the Central Pacific, created a backroom deal that helped Dodge — who was in a much worse position since the Californians already had the de facto title to the disputed region — save face for the Union Pacific. In a deal arranged in a smoky room at the home of Congressman Samuel Hooper, a shareholder in each of the concerned parties (Union Pacific, Central Pacific, and Credit Mobelier). Hooper helped set meeting point Promontory Point; this was despite Stanford's assertion that "there is not a sufficient supply of suitable water any point between Rosebud Creek . . . and the Bear River[12]," thus leaving Ogden as the only feasible alternative for the grand junction.

Nevertheless, Promontory — a small gentile community — was declared the official junction, and the Central Pacific bought the Union Pacific line all the way up

[10] [Sanborn, 1899], pp. 27, 62
[11] Quoted in [Verdoia, 2002]
[12] Quoted in [Bain, 1999]

to five miles short of Ogden. There, Huntington hoped to build a new non-Mormon community that could serve as an effective junction of the two railways and still exclude the Mormons from the grand commerce that would flourish in the new city. So despite the efforts to enlist the Mormons in the construction of the railway and the desire to integrate the Mormons in the commerce of the United States, this integration had to be done on the terms of the railroad backers. At the same time, it seemed that the obligations to the Mormon workers would not be met. About the same time as Durant was kidnapped by his own men and ransomed for $800,000 in back pay. Brigham Young's son, Joseph A. Young, was in Washington trying to extract the money owed, but found the dire straits of the Credit Mobelier, the company engineered to build the track for the Union Pacific:

> The affairs of the Union Pacific are in a muddle. Credit is weak and there is a general apprehension that they will not meet their obligations. If the money is ever collected from them, it will be in the next world. Your son, Joseph A. Young.[13]

Like many of the workers for the Union Pacific, the wages were never paid in cash. But Young managed to secure rolling stock (still less than the million dollars owed) to build a spur line from Ogden to Salt Lake City, thus connecting the heart of Utah to the rest of the nation. After his disastrous relationship with Durant and Stanford, Young chose not to attend the Promontory ceremony, but tried to turn internal focus on the completion of the Utah Central Railroad, which was built almost entirely by volunteers. In contrast to the pompous and ballyhooed golden spike of the main line,

> The last spike of native iron was made especially for the occasion by the department of public works. Both it and the steel mallet Young used in the ceremony were engraved with the words "Holiness to the Lord." Addressing the fifteen thousand Saints at the dedication, he emphasized the theme of self-sufficiency.[14]

The Mormons were left bereft of the economic benefits of the railroad, as Huntington was conspiring to build his own monopoly on the trade within Utah and

[13] Quoted in [Verdoia, 2002]
[14] [Arrington, 1992], p. 125

they were forced to build their own connection to the main line. But the Church was still faced with the expected influx of new ideas, and the now much closer federal government. The staunchly independent of the character of the church was no longer viable.

Mormonism Reacts to the Railroad

The relative youth of the Mormon religion, however, offers it a plasticity that many other large religions cannot match. Many characteristics that are synonymous with Mormons are products of the new relationship that was created with the construction of the railroad. The Articles of Faith, a concise declaration of Mormon beliefs considered canonical scripture, was only codified in 1890 by James Talmage and reflects the changes brought about by Utah's increasing national integration. The 12^{th} Article of Faith reflects a turnaround from the bellicose resistance to the federal government some thirty years before: "We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law[15]." While such a statement would have drawn guffaws from gentiles given the impassioned resistance to an end to polygamy, the practice had been stopped a year earlier by the pragmatic president Woodruff, a successor to Brigham Young.

> The question is this: Which is the wisest course for the Latter–Day Saints to pursue to continue to attempt to practice plural marriage, with the laws of the nation against it and the opposition of sixty millions of people.[16]

In addition, the Mormons also became worried that trade with the rest of the nation would weaken their economic foundation. Consequently, the Council of the Twelve asked loyal Mormons to refrain from coffee, tea, tobacco, and alcohol, products that could not be grown locally (Arrington 175). This economic desire thus made the advice offered in Joseph Smith's revelation into a binding covenant, which has later become an integral part of the Mormon identity.

[15] [Talmage, 1982], p. 3
[16] [DC, 1831] 139:9

> And, again, strong drinks are not for the belly, but for the washing of your bodies. And again, tobacco is not for the body, neither for the belly, and is not good for man, but is an herb for bruises and all sick cattle, to be used with judgment and skill. And again, hot drinks are not for the body or belly.[17]

The Church took more direct action against outside economic interests. Fearing outside economic interests would destroy local industry and commerce by underselling local merchants, Mormon leadership founded Zion's Co-operative Mercantile Institution (ZCMI) in order to create a united front against outside forces. Using the market power of the Church's directives just as with the ban on alcohol and tobacco, the church urged for a boycott of all non ZCMI businesses. This system prevented the price-fixing schemes that earlier Salt Lake merchants had used to create artificial shortages; while ZCMI was still a business which desired to be profitable, it was at least one that was guided by the interests of Utah first. Also, by pooling the resources of formerly independent Mormon merchants, the cooperative could secure credit and reasonable shipping from outside manufacturers.

While a number of gentile merchants suffered because of the boycott, Utah developed one of the first department stores in the United States and transformed the hardy communal spirit that helped the Mormons endure near invasion, drought, and taming a desert into a new, market-driven communalism that offered direct dividends to investors even after its first year in business. Still majority owned by the Church until 1988, ZCMI and the frugal efforts of latter president Lorenzo Snow transformed the Church's desire for mere self-sufficiency into a mercantile powerhouse in the 20^{th} century, in part due to the economic pressure and opportunities brought by the railroad.

The transcontinental railroad certainly changed Utah, but it changed all of America. Distances were shortened, and the frontier was tamed. The rule of law, since enforcement was quicker and more certain, became more uniform. While this meant the erosion of the frontier spirit of the West, it more dramatically ended the idiosyncratic practice of polygamy for the Mormons. The Mormons also had a unique look at the cutthroat practices of the men building the railroad across

[17][Talmage, 1982], p. 3

their lands. The citizens of Ogden worked to grade and lay the track for both the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific and saw the driving of the golden spike by the very representatives whose crafty financial maneuverings cheated them out of their wages. The Mormons enjoyed a personal glimpse of the construction of the transcontinental railroad, but not one fundamentally different from the other communities in the newly connected nation.

Local customs gave way to a greater homogeneity as transportation and a shrinking America made unpopular patterns more visible. Local economic patterns were also integrated and subsumed in a growing nation's economy; business had to either fold or adapt to changing rules, which the Mormons did with swift agility. Railroads, the nation's first national big business, set a precedent. While they could bilk and swindle the average worker, the collective strength of such organizations such as ZCMI could successfully interact in a newly connected national economy.

Chapter 3

Us vs. Them: Rhetoric and Collectivization

The completion of the last link in America's railroad network finally created a system that brought the vast majority of the United States within reach. This seeming contraction of distances helped foster a united American identity; at the same time, it also fostered the growth of cooperative enterprises. The previous section looked at how the pressure of outside competition created the impetus for a collectivization of Utah commerce; this section will further examine the development of this phenomenon — particularly its connection to railroads in Utah — as well as a peculiar collectivization experiment permanently intertwined with railroads in Pullman, Illinois. Both began at roughly the same time as collectivizations ordered from on high, and thrived until the Panic of 1893. Their response to this national catastrophe reflects the intrinsic internal differences of these two attempts to harness the power of collectivization. What allowed ZCMI to survive into the 21^{st} century while Pullman's community was destroyed by the nation-shaking Pullman Strike?

Like the drive to establish the Word of Wisdom, much of the collectivization movement was a means to prevent the outflow of money from Utah. The settlers coming into Utah did not have much money to begin with; the handcart caravans from Iowa City in June of 1856 brought hundreds of settlers into the valley without even the money to buy oxen before the journey. Those that did have money before

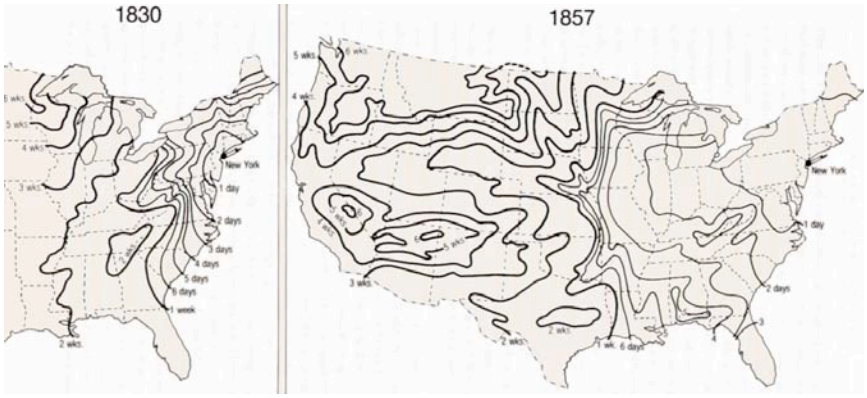

Figure 3.1: Travel times from New York City [Cronon, 1991]

moving to Utah often spent it trying to get there. This initial dearth of capital was not helped by the absence of means for capital to flow into Utah. Few firms existed that were soliciting outside investment, and projects that could have brought in external capital often became twisted into further extensions of the barter system that prevailed in the state.

The largest interaction between Utah and the outside world serves as a prime example of how standard commerce devolved into barter. The final debt to the Utah citizens who helped grade the Union Pacific was paid with rolling stock rather than with cash. Credit Mobilier, with its dying gasps, paid off a portion of its debts with goods because it had already paid out the rest of its cash. This material was then focused into the development branch lines, but brought no money into the closed economy. Even when the builders were flush with cash, the policy of the Church created an atmosphere that stifled the development of a commerce-based economy.

Brigham Young did not want an influx of opportunists seeking high wages to build the railroad, so created a system that artificially depressed wages. Work needed to be done, and the external cash was a boon to the economy, but wages needed to be kept low enough not to encourage outsiders from entering the state. Some leaders were even advocating the policy that it was better to work for free than to encourage gentiles to enter the state[1].

[1][Arrington, 1992], p. 246

Religion and commerce under one roof

But the low wages offered by the subcontractors were supplemented by the barter system already developed within the state. Because most of the workers were recruited and organized by local wards, a tertiary wage distribution network developed that allowed the barter system to supplement the paltry per diem the men received from the ward and the construction company. Workers would receive remittances that would allow them to get out of paying tithing in the future, thus providing an ersatz compensation that was additionally untaxable. This same pattern - vouchers in lieu of actual compensation - would continue for decades to come through merchandise certificates from ZCMI until the practice was seen by the IRS as a means to evade taxes.

The tithing centers kept local goods in the community; an individual ward would use the goods collected at tithe centers to help develop the ward and support poorer members. On a larger scale, the tithing centers further strengthened the barter system within Utah. Even the Church's theater, described by W.F. Rae in his 1870 visit to the state as "a stone building which would do credit to many cities of greater importance" in an otherwise vitriolic travelogue, used tithing as wages to prevent paying out cash[2]. Patrons could even bring chickens and produce to purchase seats[3].

There were some groups that clamored for greater interaction with the outside world, but the policies of isolationism ended up destroying the groups that would have brought in external Capital. William S. Godbe, a druggist, organized a group of Mormon merchants who were opposed to the isolation of gentiles in Utah. They advocated the development of trade and mining within the region to develop trade. Church leaders, however, did not want to develop mining for fear of fostering the immoral frontier communities that often accompanied mining towns. Declaring these economic viewpoints heresy, these men were excommunicated in 1870 only to see their ideas implemented twenty years later[4].

Instead, the economy began to even more firmly focus on the barter system.

[2][Rae, 1871], p. 108
[3][Arrington, 1992], p. 213
[4][Anderson, 1942], p. 259

The development of the cooperative movement, as outlined in the previous section, could be seen as a means to support the infrastructure of a barter economy with greater efficiency. Brigham Young outlined the future policy of the church in the establishment of the cooperative movement in Utah:

> I will venture to say that we have given hundreds of dollars to them [the Gentiles] where they have given us one, consequently we are not in their debt, neither are we in debt to our merchants, not in the least. We did not ask them to come here; we do not ask them to stay, neither do we ask them to go away. We do not ask them to give us their goods, neither do we ask them to take them away. They are at perfect liberty to open their stores and exhibit their goods for sale, and we have the privilege of letting them alone' and that is not all, I mean that we shall do.[5]

All of the "worthy" merchants were offered shares of the new enterprise in exchange for stock in the future. While some gentile merchants were brought into the fold, most were excluded. Since their goods would quickly decrease in value once the transcontinental railroad was completed, it would be silly to pay inflated prices for goods now only to have them rendered worthless later.

Apart from Brigham Young's presidency of the nascent corporation, the church played an integral role the development of the initial local stores. In locations where an established merchant had not signed over his stock, stores were created in existing ward storehouses. There, ZCMI encouraged the existing Relief Societies (the women's associations) to take control of the store. This uncharacteristically egalitarian gesture was somewhat pragmatic; leaders did not want women loafing at home, and they thought that women would be better judges of consumer goods and sterner hagglers[6].

Moreover, even while it was possible to create large masses of liquid capital with ZCMI — it was from the very start a profitable venture — the Church discouraged the very measures that would have invited investment. The founders only allowed internal investment in the corporation, to prevent outsiders from dictating policy in a decreed monopoly that would jeopardize the individuals ZCMI was designed

[5][Cannon, 1868], Oct. 21, 1868
[6][Arrington, 1958], p. 306

to serve and thus discouraged monied interests from investing large sums of money. They wanted to ensure that most of the shares were held by small individuals (in the amounts of $5 or $10 shares). Unfortunately, the scarcity of money within Utah precluded this; most of the shares were held by Young and Hooper, although large shareholders were prevented from exercising the full extent of their power.

Mormon iron: searching for money

Figure 3.2: Mormon Railroads

The drive for self-sufficiency was intimately intertwined with the coming of the railroads even beyond the threat of external competition mentioned earlier. The construction of the later railroads that branched out from the national railroads in the north could not have been possible without the effort of the local wards that divided up the task of grading and received no pay for their work. While skilled laborers were given tithing remittances, the workers themselves didn't even receive pay for building the railroad. In this way, Utah was able to build railroads stretching from Idaho to Arizona with minimal investment. This, in conjunction with the telegraph system built earlier, allowed the coordination of the central planning required by the new cooperative economy.

The railroads allowed the development of the "Mormon Dixie," a region of southern Utah and Arizona which could be used for the cultivation of cotton and tobacco. Flaunting comparative advantage, Young in particular wanted to develop the region to close the remaining gaps that prevented Utah from being self-sufficient. Moreover, it allowed Utah to become a broader community; the railroads allowed more individuals to come to General Conference and other large church events that allowed

central leadership to sculpt the broader public option. Although this had been accomplished by directives issued to local pastors, this made the efforts far more effective. The railroads provided this transportation without cost, and also provided free transportation for immigrants. While the lines attempted to follow the course of mining settlements in order to recoup the costs of construction (admittedly smaller thanks to nearly free labor), the many subsidies offered on the lines prevented their profitability.

One by one, the railroads fell into debt. Despite last minute loans from the big wheels in Salt Lake City and from ZCMI, the railroads were gobbled up by outside interests to quickly make them profitable. The railroads, which had been a symbol of pride for the communities who built them quickly became objects of scorn as leaders encouraged traveling families to go by wagon rather than "line the pockets of [Railroad Baron Stephen] Gould [7]." Railroads, which had created the collectivist fervor and were further developed thanks to the communal spirit of the people of Utah, were wrested from the Mormons; economic reality and external pressure created an untenable position. As Utah began to become more integrated into the national economy, it became more vulnerable to external fluctuations.

Pulling the nation apart

Another communal society that was created by George Pullman, who helped create the unique experience for passengers on American railroads. The cabinet maker earned a reputation as a practical genius by solving seemingly impossible problems like how to move a hotel several feet. He was also very particular, and created a line of posh sleeping cars that quickly became the de facto standard for American travel. As it quickly became apparent that the company would be successful and demand for the cars began to surge, permanent facilities were sought. The congressional investigation of the company describes the community built by the company:

> In 1880 the company bought 500 acres of land, and upon 300 acres of it built its plant and also a hotel, arcade, churches, athletic grounds,

[7] [Arrington, 1992], p. 282

Figure 3.3: The Pullman Community [Peterson, 1999]

> and brick tenements suitable for the use of its employees. The town is well laid out and has a complete sewerage system and water system. It is beautified by well-kept open spaces and stretches, flower beds, and lakes. The whole is at all times kept in neat order by the company. The main object was the establishment of a great manufacturing business upon a substantial and money-making basis.[8]

Like the community created by the Mormons, the goal of the Pullman community was to create a cohesive, morally pure community that kept money within Pullman. The company established services to best maintain their stranglehold on the community. Doctors charged unreasonable rates and often testified on behalf of the company if the injury was the company's fault. By being the sole source of commerce, housing, transportation, and spiritual guidance for the people of Pullman, the company could be sure to profit and maintain a strict command of the attention of its members.

While not as pervasive as the patriarchal structure of the Mormons, the Pullman did foster atmosphere of strict control that placed men firmly in control of the community at each level of society from Pullman at the top to the men at home. Given the hard work in Pullman, there were few jobs in the town for the women and children until 1893, when knitting and upholstery plants were opened. The women were then relegated to take charge of the households. Even then, however, the role

[8][Wright, 1895], p. XXI

of women was undermined by the collective will of the town. Roving gangs of agents from the company charged with maintaining social fiber in the households (not to mention property values) could fine or evict women not living up to the standards of the community[9].

Like Utah, the community in Pullman was a diverse mix of immigrants. A good number were native Midwesterners, but the largest single group was the constantly shifting mix of newly arrived immigrants from Europe. Pullman even purposely imported laborers; almost all of the Pullman porters were imported blacks from the deep south[10]. Unlike the Mormon's drive for unity in creating an us against them mentality, the structures created by the Pullman Company further alienated the workers and created further divisions within the community. Churches and ethnic clubs further fostered the initial differences between groups. Even the stratagems — such as athletic programs — concocted by Pullman to foster unity were ethnically polarized[11].

The Pullman company, faced with the economic downturn of the mid-1890s decided to keep rents fixed while slashing the pay for most employees. Since the employees were unable to own their homes in Pullman, the company was able to effectively reduce prices more than any other employer. Since the company controlled both income and housing, it could follow national price trends with the former while keeping the latter fixed. This created the antagonistic atmosphere needed for the final dissolution of the cooperative community envisioned by Pullman. Unions such as the ARU were able to offer the feelings of unity that Pullman could only offer lip service. The schism between the management and the workers catalyzed the formation of a new community, the union. The myriad groups merged into a new collective entity to combat the old. Unity, which had been unsuccessfully manufactured by Pullman was formed spontaneously "...from repeated wage cuts, long hours, and tyrannical supervision[12]."

While both ZCMI and the Pullman community could be aptly considered patriarchal organizations to restrict external trade and enrich the heads of the or-

[9] [Reiff, 1999], p. 72
[10] [Reinhardt, 1970], 16.II
[11] [Hirsch, 1999], p. 45
[12] [Hirsch, 1999], p. 47

Figure 3.4: Drunken National Guardsmen guarding Pullman's works [Peterson, 1999]

ganizations, one succumbed to robbing the members it was meant ostensibly serve while the other endured economic hardship. While it could be correctly argued that Pullman was less keen to protect the welfare of its members than ZCMI, Pullman provided average incomes far above the meager income of Utah farmers. ZCMI's success, however, was contingent on maintaining the zeal of its followers and capitalizing on the "us against them" mentality cemented in the (quite well-justified) persecution complex of the Mormon community. Pullman, however, lacked any sort of community beyond the simple collocation offered by its model city; this void was left to be filled by the populist rhetoric of the ARU. Pullman, a community in name only, thus was left to become a failed experiment while the Mormons quietly endured.

Chapter 4

Huntington and the Media

Ambrose Bierce, the master of vitriol, said that C. P. Huntington was the "meanest of all men in life or history." While his characterization of a railroad man, "this indefatigable seeker for unfair advantages, this promoted peasant with a low love of labor and an unslackable thirst for gain, being already so rich that he stinks" is certainly hyperbole, there must be some kernel of truth and legitimate ire behind Bierce inflammatory populist rhetoric in the pages of San Francisco's *Examiner*. Bierce's adroit allegations are intrinsically interesting, but they also present a tapestry of clues that represent popular discontent within the public as railroads lost their luster and the railroad industry's perception of the public, the morality of graft, and the media. Bierce's choice of target also offers an interesting peek into a standard 19th century recipe for slander in California, as Huntington and his cronies also employed many of the tools used by Bierce forty years earlier.

Our investigation will look at how the aspect of the early days of railroad that were so admired — individual men bending nature and government to meet their own desires — became the object of vilification. Did men like Collis Huntington simply overstay their welcome, or did the same man who built up a mercantile and railroad fortune from scratch become corrupted once he built the transcontinental railroad? In the case of Huntington, it seems that his early actions taken to "get the job done" were later abandoned in a shift as his distaste for graft grew; unfortunately, his conversion came too late, and he was left to suffer his previous transgressions in the court of public opinion.

A Humble Oligarch

Huntington, the son of an outspoken poor handyman, was torn from his family at an early age and became a partner in his brother's store in Oneonta, New York after building up a small fortune selling bric-a-brac on the road. On the Ides of March, 1849, Collis became wrapped up in the national excitement over the discovery of gold in California and left the relative comfort of the S. & C.P. Huntington Store. With a large group of New York opportunists, Collis left his wife Elizabeth behind and went to California to open up a branch of S. & C. P. After peddling his wares to the various camps around Sacramento, Huntington decided to focus on bringing goods in from New York and the East Coast rather than risk himself and his merchandise in the mudslides and snows of the remote mining camps.

His desire to stay on top of local trends and keep his standing stocks low created an interest in securing rapid transit between Sacramento and New York. Huntington had to keep watch over each shipment as it wandered around the tip of South America and back up the coast to California. Any point along its route could create a delay, and captains or warehouse owners might decide to cut their losses and auction the cargo before it would make its final destination.

Figure 4.1: Collis Huntington [Lavender, 1970]

Naturally, these circumstances caused him to become very interested in the schemes of the California railroad engineer Theodore Judah and the accompanying Republican rhetoric of men like J.C. Frémont. It was a series of editorials, however,

that brought the issue to a head.

James King, who attacked the Know-Nothing government in San Francisco, was gunned down by his political enemies. A mob came after the police station where the killer was held and exacted vigilante justice. Huntington began corresponding with the leader of the so-called Law-and-Order party and asked about instructions for setting up his own organization in Sacramento. In the ensuing tensions between William Tecumseh Sherman and the militia, Huntington and the nascent Republican movement picked up King's tradition and began publishing their own newspaper from Huntington's store at 54 K Street.

Taking up the Republican Cause

The *California Daily Republican* (also called the *California Daily Times*) was published in a shack next to Huntington's store, and although his name never appeared on the masthead, his patronage and close association with the editors of the paper, Cornelius Cole and James McClatchy, surely had a decisive impact on the content of the paper. The paper's mission — to proselytize for the Fremont's cause — was propounded each day on the front page in a piece called the prospectus, which ran daily until October 7, 1856, announced that

> To withstand this torrent of aggression, to rebuke this insolence, to chastise these freebooters, to scatter this nest of marauders, and to check this monstrous and ever-increasing wrong has the Republican Party become organized. The Times will not lag in the chase, nor dally in the contest. Let the friends of the Pacific Railroad, Freedom and Fremont, be up and doing.[1]

Thus the paper clearly linked the idea of a transcontinental railroad with the Republican cause from the very beginning. The paper quickly fell into a furious monotony: a front page article on the railroads, the corruption in Sacramento, and the grandeur of Fremont. The inside pages were littered with the standard contingent of news from other newspapers, anti-slavery pieces, and surprisingly unobtrusive ads for Huntington & Co.

[1] [CDT, 1856]

Slavery's less than prominent position on California Republicans' agenda isn't surprising given the state's rather extreme removal from the melees being fought in the East. But what is surprising is how the paper chose to deal with the topic when it did. The paper certainly took a personal approach to nearly every issue in order to conjure up pathos, and focused neither on the holders of slaves nor on the slaves themselves but the supporters of policy in the North and South. "You are as pusillanimous a set of curs as ever disgraced any country," elides one example of a diatribe against Northern doughboys, "You disgrace the name your fathers bore. You dare not be men – you are mere serfs[2]."

The editors did not foster an atmosphere of tact in the new publication. They did, however, hone the skill of near slander into a fine art. First, the subject is separated from the reading audience both geographically and ideologically. "Again, they say he is the son of poor parent that his father taught school, and that Fremont himself was a kind of charity boy. Well, we admit all this[3]. The rhetoric draws the messianic figure of Fremont closer to the readers while pushing away the far off jackals in Washington. The next stage is to begin an attack on the virtue, integrity, morals, and even hygiene of the targets.

> We have all the gamblers and prostitutes in the state against us and also the whole herd of office seekers, who have long fattened at the public crib. Then again we have all the 'Chivalry' opposed to us. That delectable crowd of brandy-drinking, pistol-shooting, swearing, swaggering gentry, who turn up their noses at all honest labor.[4]

This idea of an elite in California would appear in vitriolic editorials in the not too distant future, however. Huntington's wheeling and dealing in the construction of the transcontinental railroad would not only eventually earn him millions but also cast him as a voracious hungry power-monger — along with his comrades Crocker, Stanford, and Hopkins — trying to swindle the American people out of their money.

[2][CDT, 1856], 10.9.56
[3][CDT, 1856], 8.15.56
[4]Quoted in [Lavender, 1970], p. 67

His Own Medicine

Figure 4.2: Ambrose Bierce [Lavender, 1970]

Indeed, this editorial could have just as easily appeared twenty years later in the work of Ambrose Bierce, who was writing for the *San Francisco Examiner* when the divisive Funding Bill began percolating through Congress. Hearst brought in Bierce, cartoonists, and a cadre of reporters to expose the story to the entire nation. Bierce develops Huntington simultaneously into a demonic master of political backroom dealings and a buffoon who couldn't manage to dress himself, let alone hoodwink an entire nation and mesmerize the entirety of the U.S. Congress. Bierce follows the same stenciled pattern for bringing down a powerful figure. First, Bierce separates Huntington — a man who had spent nearly all of his adult life in California — from the state by asserting that his supporters "professed to represent the convictions of the National Board of Trade. It turns out, however, that with a single exception all these boards have their several habitats east of the Mississippi – and the exception is at St. Louis[5]." Bierce also, before attacking the substance of the question, makes sure to make an eloquent and biting jibe at personal character. "The spectacle of this old man standing on the brink of eternity," wrote Bierce on observing his deposition to Congress, describing "his pockets laden with dishonest gold[6]."

Yet despite the descriptions of Huntington answering questions "with every evasion of which his faulty intelligence was capable, with every falsehood that he dared when evasion was no longer possible, and with every outward and visible sign of an inner torment that the flesh could denote,[7]" the arguments that Bierce puts

[5][Bierce, 1895], p. 24: "Washington Under Morgan's Lash" February 17, 1895
[6][Bierce, 1895], p 22: "His Deal with Pacific Mail" February 14, 1895
[7][Bierce, 1895], p. 25: "Washington Under Morgan's Lash" February 17, 1895

forward are — while masterfully framed — lacking in substantial evidence outside of inventions convenient for the moment. Bierce makes simultaneous arguments that Huntington's near monopoly in the Southwest creates artificially high rates while claiming that Huntington is running below cost to put competitors our of business[8]. For although Huntington's misdeeds and swindles during the construction of the Transcontinental are uncontested, the force of Beirce's vituperation was falling, somewhat ironically, on what could be called a born again baron.

Huntington, who had cheerfully and eagerly bought senators by the dozen (with the skillful lobbying of Judah), became disenchanted with the dirty dealings in politics during the Sargent affair. Aaron Sargent had been the US envoy to Germany, but had been recalled for taking too harsh a line on tariff issues. After returning to California, he — with the staunch backing of Huntington — decided to run for the vacant senate seat. Since Stanford had become deeply entrenched in the Republican leadership, his support would be needed to secure the nomination. Huntington claimed to have received a pledge of support from Stanford for Sargent, but Stanford himself entered the field against Sargent, thus garnering the ire of Huntington[9].

Shortly thereafter, Huntington, having shed his interests (with the exception of his shipyards at Newport News) east of the Mississippi, decided to get revenge on Stanford. While part of his motive was revenge, Huntington had also taken a hard line against graft and corruption. He, after seeing the other side of the dirty backroom deals that had been the modus operandi for decades, embarked on a campaign to clean up his own businesses. After the split with Stanford in 1890, Huntington hired W. Snow, Stanford's chief dispenser of political and media lubrication, to actively fight corruption in his company. This is perhaps just a means of further casting Stanford in a negative light, but Huntington took extreme measures like pulling out of his payments to political organizations and erstwhile friendly newspapers, embarking on a new goal to "serve the state, the nation, and all people.[10]"

Unfortunately, the ouster of Stanford only focused the ire of those cheated

[8] [Bierce, 1895], p. 15: "Mr. Huntington on the Grill" February 8, 1895
[9] [Lavender, 1970], p. 345
[10] [Lavender, 1970], p. 363

by the transcontinental swindles on the newly reformed Huntington. And although Bierce could not find substantive arguments to implicate Huntington in current scandals, the older ones were justification enough. Bierce even conducted an attack on the railroad's grassroots efforts to show public support, tracking down each of the supporters who had signed a petition in support of the railroad and printing their retractions in the newspaper. Until they did, their names appeared on Bierce's Black list; eventually most of the signers recanted[11].

Although Bierce succeeded in creating momentum for the anti-government crusade, it was an ultimately nugatory effort; the company was given eighty years to repay the debt. The government would not see the money again. Nevertheless, Huntington's unique tribulation offered the nation a form of active politics that would be unthinkable today: grassroots opposition and grassroots countermeasures, strong positions by politicians and the papers, and a literary mind like Bierce behind the orchestrated public outrage. Bierce's writings, though masterful, are merely the continuation of the slanderous writings mastered during Huntington's time at the helm of a newspaper; despite the artistry of the technique, it is merely the repetition of a predetermined pattern applied to the circumstances and rarely makes a sound argument for the cause. Yet this dance does reveal emotion; Huntington and his associates created an empire at the cost of the good will of their fellow Californians.

[11] [Hicks, 1998]

Conclusion

The history of railroads in America is - since railroads are a form of transportation - inextricably tied to bringing communities together. But railroads have served a purpose beyond simply moving people from point A to point B. The nature of the railroad was that of changing the communities it connected: not merely — as it was in Europe — a connective technology but also a transformational one.

Unlike in Europe, sometimes the point B in America didnt exist until after the railroad came. In the 1830s, Chicago became a city, and indeed a destination only because of the railroad. Once the routes of transportation were open, the birth of a major city was guaranteed. These new connections in turn changed the origins of the railroad in the already settled Northeast. The cities of the East Coast could devote themselves to commerce and industry after the Midwest seized upon their comparative advantage in agriculture.

Then again, sometimes in connecting point A to point B, you change what lies between. The monumental achievement of linking the two heavily populated coasts of the United States changed the cultural geography of the land in between. The anomaly of the de facto sovereign Mormon Utah was unsuccessfully challenged by no less than the United States Army in 1857. While what the locals called an invasion didnt change the structure of society, the Mormons instead helped build the machinery of their own metamorphosis.

The railroad connected groups separated by geography, but they also connected groups in a common purpose. The junctions of railroads were not just an accretion point of population, industry, and commerce. Despite this triumph in capitalism that supplied a means to streamline the processes of production and transportation,

there was also a populist backlash of those in the wake of the railroad and those in the railroads employ. The communal structure of the Mormons in Utah and the residents of Pullman, who turned against their corporate masters and found solidarity with the ARU, signaled the end of the carte blanche given to the initial rulers of the rails.

Eventually, this dissatisfaction would spread to the rest of society. The personality-centered journalism of the 19^{th} century was a means of manipulating the feelings of society as well as reflecting it, but Ambrose Bierce's attacks against Huntington reflected the growing dissatisfaction with the now ubiquitous railroads. The commercial aspects of railroads now served not to unify the country but to cause division. The underhanded scheming in the construction created a deep schism between the population and the railroad masters.

This shift in purpose — static railroads epitomizing big business rather than a tool of society to forge closer interconnections — was the harbinger of the coming downfall of American railways. Nationalized in 1917 and limping along today as shadows of their former might. Yet the transformations of the railroads such as standardized time, national communication and travel, labor unions and collective enterprises persist. Even though other modes of transportation now connect the nation, the transformation of the railroads persists.

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