

The Transcontinental Railroad: Transforming California and the Nation

June 25-30 and July 9-14, 2017

The following schedule provides an overview of the topics addressed in each day of the week-long institute, the general flow of activities, and the readings associated with each day. Institute readings include articles and selected chapters—some considered classics, some more recent interpretations, some written by guest faculty presenters. Together, they provide valuable background and varying perspectives on our topic.

Required readings should be read in advance of the workshop. Optional related readings provide additional information on selected topics. You may refer to them as appropriate to your curriculum project or interest.

The course reader will be available to download from the institute's website upon acceptance.

Additional handouts—mostly primary sources and curriculum support—will be handed out over the course of our week together.

Sunday / Day One: Welcome & Orientation

→ *Guiding Questions: What factors are responsible for establishing Sacramento as the ideal terminus of the Transcontinental Railroad?*

- ❖ Meet and greet reception with light refreshments hosted by the Sacramento History Museum
- ❖ Self-guided tours of the museum galleries
- ❖ Walking tour of Historical Old Sacramento above and below ground

Required Readings

1. Richardson, Heather Cox. "It Was Statesmanship to Give Treeless Prairies Value': The Transcontinental Railroad" in *The Greatest Nation of the Earth: Republican Economic Policies during the Civil War*, 170-208.
This chapter looks at the processes through which the federal government became involved in building the transcontinental railroad and shows the popularity at the Congressional level for the railroad and the political process toward construction.
2. Orsi, Richard J. "These Mountains Look Too Ugly and I See Too Much Work Ahead': Building the Southern Pacific Company, 1850-1930" in *Sunset Limited: The Southern Pacific Railroad and the Development of the American West, 1850-1930*, 3-44.
This excerpt details the origins of the Central Pacific Railroad, completion of the Transcontinental Railroad, and the birth of the Southern Pacific Railroad with a focus on the "Big Four."
3. Deverell, William. "What Is This Railroad to Do for Us?" in *Railroad Crossing: Californians and the Railroad, 1850-1910*, 9-32.
This piece discusses opposition to the railroads and takes the reader through the process of construction to highlight the concerns of California citizens.

Optional Related Readings

1. Fogel, Robert William. "The Paradox of Premature Enterprise" in *Union Pacific Railroad: A Case of Premature Enterprise*, 17-24.

According to Fogel, the Union Pacific Railroad was a paradox: prematurely built, but lagging behind national need; essential for national defense, but impracticable, as it was not yet driven by profit. This paradox forced federal government involvement. Fogel explains the motivations of railroad promoters, the process by which railroads eventually found financial backing, and the roots of the financial scandals that rose from railroad construction.

2. Orsi, Richard J. "Railroads in the History of California and the Far West: An Introduction" *California History*, Vol. 70, No. 1, (Spring 1991), pp. 2-11.

This article, published as part of a special theme issue for California History created to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the California State Railroad Museum, provides an overview of the various topics, themes, and historical discussions that surrounded Western railroad construction.

3. Taylor, George Rogers. "Railroads" in *Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860*, 74-103.

Provides background to the development of the transcontinental railroad from an eastern perspective. Focuses primarily on the early years of railroad development back into the 1820s and ends with a glimpse at the success of the industry in the 1860s. Discusses early railroad sponsorship and the reasons railroads were seen as having revolutionized transportation.

4. Schwantes, Carlos A. and James P. Ronda. "The Magician's Rod: Railroads, The West, and Manifest Destiny" in *The West the Railroads Made*, 3-36.

This selection discusses the demands for a transcontinental railroad beginning in the 1820s. Includes discussion of Manifest Destiny, railroad promoters, and the connection between war and railroad construction.

Monday / Day Two: From Rivers to Rails

➔ *Guiding Questions: Why was the Transcontinental Railroad built, and at what cost?*

- ❖ Welcome & Overview [HP Team]
- ❖ Lecture and discussion: "America Before the Transcontinental Railroad" [Louis Warren]

This lecture will set the stage for the development of the Transcontinental Railroad. Looking at the creation of the Pacific Railway Act, the outbreak of the Civil War, and the movement of people westward. This lecture will orient summer scholars in the 19th century and allow for deeper discussion of the day's readings.

- ❖ Docent led tour of the California State Railroad Museum (CSRM)
- ❖ Discussion of readings [Louis Warren & HP Team]

- ❖ Lecture and discussion: "How Much Was it Worth?" [Rachel St. John]

This lecture will help summer scholars understand the vast amounts of money spent on the building of the Transcontinental Railroad. It will highlight the importance of materials and labor in calculations of the cost.

Required Readings

1. Orsi, Richard J. "Railroads and the Urban Environment: The Sacramento Story," *Valley Life: An Environmental History of the Sacramento Region*, eds. Chris Castaneda and Lee Simpson, pp. 77 ff.

In this excerpt, Orsi uses Sacramento as a case study to look at the environmental impact of railroads on cities. He argues that the railroad fundamentally reoriented urban spaces and changed individuals

relationship and access to the environment. He indicates that while the railroad created problems such as landscape degradation, pollution, and disturbed environmental patterns, it also had the constructive consequence of encouraging a sustainable equilibrium with nature.

2. Schivelbusch, Wolfgang. "Railroad Space and Railroad Time" and "The American Railroad" in *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization and Perception of Time and Space in the 19th Century*, 33-44 and 89-98.

The first excerpt identifies three ways the railroad was an "annihilation of space and time": opening up new spaces that were unavailable with previous travel methods due to time of travel, eliminating spaces between destinations that previously had been part of the journey, and ending isolation of remote regions whether in their best interest or not. The second excerpt explains the development of American railroads in comparison to English railroads. Schivelbusch argues that changes to transportation in the United States were seen as efforts to civilize the wilderness rather than the destruction of non-mechanized culture since roads and other forms of transportation were minimal in many parts of the nation. The railroad was a productive development as it opened up new territories rather than destructive and replacing an older way of life.

Optional Related Readings

1. Cronon, William. "Rails and Water" in *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*, 63-93.
This excerpt discusses how the railroad altered society's relationship with time and space, specifically the standardization of time after 1883.
2. Schivelbusch, Wolfgang. *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization and Perception of Time and Space in the 19th Century*.
This book provides details on train specifications from the type of wheels to the compartment arrangement. Schivelbusch also suggests that the advent of rail travel transformed peoples' understanding of space and time, ushering in a new era of industrial perceptions of geography and society.

Tuesday / Day Three: Technology and Labor Meets the Landscape

➔ *Guiding Questions: How did railroad engineers and laborers overcome the significant geographic barriers? At what cost was feat this achieved?*

- ❖ **Lecture and discussion: "Immigration, Migration, and the People Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad" [Rachel St. John]**
This talk will delve into the people who actually constructed the railroad. It will highlight how and why the workers ended up on the rail line, their interactions with locals, and the importance of the Transcontinental Railroad to the larger immigration story.
- ❖ **Lecture and discussion: "Railroad and Western Environment" [Louis Warren]**
This lecture will focus on the environmental impact of the railroad in both California and the mid-West. In particular, it will focus on the physical changes to landscape, the destruction of animal life, and how both of those changes altered the economy of the United States.
- ❖ **Field Study: Hike Donner Pass and the Railroad Tunnels**
This field study a powerful trip into the Sierras. Actually seeing the tunnels created using black powder, witnessing the immense size of the engineering feats, and reflecting on the enormity of the landscape helps summer scholars reach a deeper understanding of the Transcontinental Railroad.
- ❖ **Curriculum idea exchange and dinner at The Sierra Club's Clair Tappaan Lodge**

Required Readings

1. Saxton, Alexander. "Mines and Railroads" in *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California*, 60-66.

This excerpt provides a brief synopsis of the role of Chinese labor in building the railroad, some of the reasons Chinese laborers were preferred by management, and the inequalities that existed between Chinese workers and their white counterparts.

2. Takaki, Ronald. "Gam Saan Haak: The Chinese in Nineteenth-Century America" in *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, 84-87.

This selection identifies the crucial part Chinese laborers played in the construction of the railroad. Takaki asserts that the railroad was a Chinese achievement as their labor and skill completed the tunnels through Donner Summit. This short selection offers additional discussion on working conditions and includes a description of Chinese laborers striking.

3. Andrews, Thomas G. "'Made by Toile'? Tourism, Labor, and the Construction of the Colorado Landscape, 1858-1917." *Journal of American History*, Vol. 92, No. 3 (Dec., 2005), pp. 837-863.

Andrews explores the historical circumstances that made railroad workers invisible to their contemporaries. He focuses on tourists from the beginning of leisure travel during the gold rush era (pre-railroad) when laborers appeared frequently in travel logs, through the early twentieth century when railroads made leisure travel easier and laborers became obscured in favor of detailing engineering genius.

Wednesday / Day Four: The Railroad and the West in American Memory and Imagination

➔ *Guiding Questions: What did the art of the nineteenth century reveal about the West in American imagination? How did art entice people aboard the railroads westward? What was the relationship between the railroads and Native peoples and how did it change over time?*

❖ Docent-led tour of the Crocker Art Museum's Californian & Western art collection

❖ Workshop: Analyzing Art by Crocker Art Museum Education Staff

This workshop provides essential tools for Summer Scholars as they begin to analyze art. It offers a deeper understanding of artistic motives and techniques that Summer Scholars will use to inform their thinking.

❖ Lecture and discussion: "The Machine and the Garden: America in Landscape Painting" [Louis Warren]

This lecture will build on the art workshop by providing background and analysis to help contextualize the massive amount of Western art. Warren will explore how artists used the imagery and wonder of the West to encourage settlement and spread capital westward.

❖ Lunch and time to explore the Crocker collection

❖ Lecture and discussion: "Confronting the Iron Horse: American Indians and the Trans-Continental Railroads" [Lisa Emmerich]

This lecture focus on the impact of the Transcontinental Railroad on Native peoples throughout the United States. It carefully traces both the immediate and long-term consequences of the rail lines to help Summer Scholars understand the complex relationship between Native peoples, the land, and the machine.

❖ Curriculum idea exchange

Required Readings

1. Fixico, Donald. "Interview: Native Americans" from *PBS American Experience: Transcontinental Railroad* (4 pages)

In this interview, Fixico describes life for the Plains Indians before the railroad, how the U.S. government obtained the lands for the railroads, the effect of the loss of land on the buffalo and, by extension, on the Plains Indians. This interview would be easily accessible to students and is suitable for classroom use.

2. Hills, Patricia. "Picturing Progress in the Era of Westward Expansion" in *The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820-1920* edited by William Truettner, 126-147.
This excerpt deconstructs important railroad-inspired paintings in the 1860s that are excellent for classroom use.
3. Isenberg, Andrew C. "The Wild and the Tamed" in *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750-1920*, 123-163.
Details the variety of factors that contributed to the destruction of the bison, one of them being the railroad.
4. Thomas, William G. December 11, 2010, "How Railroads Took Native American Lands in Kansas" *William G. Thomas III, Professor University of Nebraska-Lincoln Blog*. (3 pages)
Thomas explains how the U.S. government obtained the lands necessary for the railroads from the Native Americans, often by defrauding the tribes in order to acquiesce to railroad companies.
5. West, Elliott. "American Indians and the Transcontinental Railroad" in *History Now: The Journal of the Gilder Lehrman Institute*. (3 pages)
After an analysis of what the "Across the Continent, Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way" painting symbolizes about the railroad from the American perspective, this article discusses the impact of the railroads on Native Americans. The piece is an excellent supplement to the other articles and would be easily accessible for students.

Optional Related Readings

1. Orsi, Richard J. "Promoting the Far West" and "'Shall This Destruction Proceed?' Wilderness Preservation" in *Sunset Limited: The Southern Pacific Railroad and the Development of the America West, 1850-1930*, 130-165 and 349-358.
The first excerpt discusses how promotion of California relied heavily on the Southern Pacific Railroad's services: transportation of individuals west, organizing abilities, and financing. The second excerpt examines the development of the conservation movement and indicates that from the beginning, the Southern Pacific Railroad was a partner as the line's directors realized their company's sustainability hinged on the protection of the West's natural resources. Train tourism into the wilderness was a powerful way to popularize the wild and encourage conservationist ethics.
2. Richter, Amy G. "Narrative Lines: Railroad Stories in Victorian Culture" in *Home on the Rails: Women, the Railroad, and the Rise of Public Domesticity*, 11-31.
Discusses the variety of railroad narratives appearing in the late-nineteenth century.
3. Schwantes, Carlos A. and James P. Ronda. *The West the Railroads Made*.
Includes a significant number of images from ads, paintings, photographs, and maps that would be useful for teacher lessons.
4. Anderson, Nancy K. "'The Kiss of Enterprise': The Western Landscape as Symbol and Resource" in *The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820-1920* edited by William Truettner, 237-283.
Using photographs, paintings, and advertisements from the late nineteenth century, this selection presents changes to the western landscape by the railroad and other forms of progress. Includes a wide range of images and primary sources for classroom use.
5. Sandweiss, Martha. "Picture Stories: Photography and the Nineteenth-Century West" and "Westward the Course of Empire: Photography and the Invention of an American Future" in *Print the Legend: Photography and the American West*, 1-14 and 155-206.

These excerpts explore the relationship between photography and popular understanding of the West and how they influenced and changed one another. The second excerpt looks specifically at the railroad and its impact.

Thursday / Day Five: Social and Economic Impact

➔ *Guiding Questions: Was the expense to the American government and its laborers necessary? What does evidence reveal about life for Chinese railroad laborers? What does the absence of evidence signify?*

❖ Travel to Stanford University

❖ Lecture: *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America*

[Richard White]

In this lecture, the Summer Scholars hear directly from the author of one of the major works they will be reading. White will raise the question of whether the circumstances justified necessity and expense of building transcontinental railroads at that time. This question provides a more critical examination of the economic factors that drove the railroads as opposed to heroic narratives with which the participants may have been more familiar.

❖ Lecture: “Chinese Laborers: Shaping the social landscape of the West” [Chinese Railroad Workers Project]

Fisher Fishkin will surprise Summer Scholars by sharing the problems of drawing conclusions about the life of Chinese railroad laborers in the absence of any written evidence. Summer Scholars will consider what the absence of evidence signifies and how to construct an understanding of their lives from the limited physical evidence left behind.

❖ Travel to San Francisco for exploration of San Francisco Maritime National Park

❖ Return to Sacramento

Required Readings (102 pages)

1. White, Richard. “Introduction,” “Genesis,” and “Men in Octopus Suits” in *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America*, xxi-xxxiv, 1-38, and 230-269.

These selections discuss railroad corporations, arguing that railroads were political animals that influenced public policy to further private gain. Together, these excerpts detail how railroad owners obtained financing for their endeavors and influenced their ‘friends’.

2. Orsi, Richard J. “The Mussel Slough Affair” in *Sunset Limited: The Southern Pacific Railroad and the Development of the America West, 1850-1930*, 92-104.

Studies the intersection of public and corporate interests, Orsi moves the discussion away from a dichotomous model that characterizes the Southern Pacific Railroad as either all corporate and selfish or democratic and publically minded. Instead, he demonstrates how at times the company pursued its own interests that also aligned with public welfare. The second excerpt looks at the Mussel Slough affair and discusses The Octopus as a primary source.

Optional Related Readings

1. Norris, Frank. *The Octopus: A Story of California*. 1901

Anti-Southern Pacific Railroad novel written in 1901. A prime example of Progressive era muckraking, this source appears frequently in histories of the railroad’s influence. It also serves as an excellent example to discuss using primary sources in classrooms.

Friday / Day Six: The Impact

→ *Guiding Questions: How did the Transcontinental Railroad change California and the Nation? How should it be remembered and commemorated?*

❖ Lecture and discussion of readings: “How the Transcontinental Railroad Changed California and the Nation” [Louis Warren]

Warren concludes the week with a lecture designed to sum up major themes and ideas from throughout the week and bring the discussion past the Gilded Age and into the Progressive Era. In particular, he will help Summer Scholars contextualize the labor unrest unfolding throughout the nation and help them recognize the significant impact the creation of the line had on the nation as a whole, and California specifically.

❖ Share Curriculum Projects in process & next steps

Required Readings (63 pages)

1. Rauchway, Eric. “Capital” in *Blessed Among Nations: How the World Made America*, 30-57.
Rauchway discusses the vital role of foreign markets in the development of the American frontier, especially the construction of the railroad. He argues that the American West, and railroads in particular, appealed to foreign investors as relatively stable opportunities with immense returns. However, the intense investment led to an unpredictable and unstable railroad industry.
2. Richter, Amy G. “Introduction” in *Home on the Rails: Women, the Railroad, and the Rise of Public Domesticity*, 1-10.
Richter’s introduction asks interesting questions about the cultural and social ramifications of the railroad. She engages with the idea of public and private spheres and argues that the railroad continuously redrew those spheres. She suggests that the redefining of the public railroad from masculine and dangerous to orderly and comfortable—not feminized but no longer masculine—created a ‘public domesticity.’
3. Schwantes, Carlos A. and James P. Ronda. “Manifest Destinies: The Railroad West and the Modern World” in *The West the Railroads Made*, 149-175.
A wide-lens discussion of the impact of the railroad, focusing on both physical changes such as new towns in the once seemingly empty prairies, and the invisible changes made to society, such as the standardization of time. Includes wonderful ads, maps, and images as well.

Optional Related Readings

1. Isenberg, Andrew C. *Mining California: An Ecological History*.
Focuses on the alterations made to California’s ecology in the early years following the gold rush. It discusses the effects of progress on the land—logging of the redwoods, hydraulic mining and its consequences, large-scale ranching, and urban development.
2. Deverell, William. “Introduction,” and “California Netted with Iron Tracks” in *Railroad Crossing: Californians and the Railroad, 1850-1910*, 1-8 and 34-60.
Discusses opposition to railroads. This selection touches on issues in the 1870s such as the Workingman’s Party of California development, the rewriting of the state’s Constitution in 1879, and Mussel Slough.
3. Richter, Amy G. “At Home Aboard: Railway Travel and the Rise of Public Domesticity” in *Home on the Rails: Women, the Railroad, and the Rise of Public Domesticity*, 59-85.
This selection delves deeper into the discussion Richter began in her Introduction (required reading) and provides ample evidence for a cultural shift.