

How did the transcontinental railroad affect assignment

[History](#)



Thesis: The transcontinental railroad greatly increased Westward expansion in the United States of America during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The history of the United States has been influenced by England in many ways. In the second half of the 1800s, the railroad, which was invented in England, had a major effect on Western expansion in the United States. ' Railroads were born in England. A country with dense populations, short distances between cities, and large financial resources.

In America there were different circumstances. A sparse population in a huge country. Large stretches between cities, and only the smallest amounts of money. ' (railroad' 85) The first American railroads started in the 1800s from the Atlantic ports of Boston, New York City, Philadelphia, Wilmington, Charleston, and Savannah (Douglas 23). Within twenty years, four rail lines had crossed the Alleghenies to reach their goal on ' Western Waters' of the Great Lakes or the tributaries of the Mississippi.

Meanwhile, other lines had started west of the Appalachian mountains, and by the mid-1800s Chicago, St. Louis, stretching westward, beyond the Mississippi. An international route connected New England and Montreal and another one crossed Southern Ontario between Niagara, New York, and the Detroit River. During the 1800s, North and South routes were developed both East and West of the Alleghenies. It was not until after the Civil War, however, that a permanent railroad bridge was constructed across the Ohio River. After the Civil War, the pace of railroad building increased.

The Pacific railroads, the Union Pacific building from Omaha, Nebraska, and the Central Pacific building from Sacramento, California, had started to build

a reincarnation's railroad during the war to help promote national unity. They were joined at Promontory, Utah, on May 10, 1869, completing the first rail connection across the continent. Before the transcontinental railroad, the Eastern railroads had lines running only as far West as Omaha, Nebraska. The Western railroads had a few lines running North and South in California, far West of the wall of the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

In between these two networks was a huge gap of about seventeen hundred miles of plains and mountain ranges. Closing this gap was a dream shared by many Americans. Businessmen thought of all the money they could make by having an entire continent full of frontiers. Frontiers dreamed of the discoveries of wild Indians, scouts and hunters, and, of course, gold. Gold had been a desired find throughout the exploration of America. The California Gold Rush of 1849 again created much excitement about the search for gold. The Pacific Railroads were founded when the Civil War was in progress.

Until the war was over, the transcontinental railroad was a giant enterprise stalled by much bickering between a reluctant Congress and the Army, who had clamored for it (Cooke 254). If it had been left to the government, it would have taken another twenty years to complete the transcontinental railroad. However, it was a commercial venture, and it was fortunately fed by the adrenaline of competition. There were two railroad companies building the transcontinental railroad, the Union Pacific from the East, and the Central Pacific from the West. The two companies struggled to beat each other in slamming down a record mileage of track.

At first, Congress avidly pursued the project and they had stipulated that the Central Pacific should stop when it reached the California Border (Congress was full of Easterners). In 1865, after much argument about the aid the government was providing to the two companies, the actual construction of the transcontinental railroad was started. Then as possible and meet wherever they came together (255). First, the Union Pacific sent out location parties, tracing the line and clearing the path by killing the Sioux and the buffalo in the way of the railroad.

Then came the construction gangs who, working in shifts, graded (flattened) the land by as much as a hundred miles a stretch. Behind them came the track-laying crews, each consisting of ten thousand men and as many animals. For each mile of track, the government was loaning the railroad from \$16,000, for flat land, to \$48,000, for mountainous land (railroad' 86). The supplies needed to lay a single mile of track included forty train cars to carry four hundred tons of rail and timber, ties, bridging's, fuel, and food, which all had to be assembled in a depot on the Missouri River.

But the Union Pacific had the twin advantages of comparatively flat land and a continuous supply line back to the factories of the East coast. It was quite different for the Central Pacific, which had to fetch most of its materials, except timber, by sea, twelve housing miles around the tip of South America. Another difference between the two companies was their work-forces. The Eastern work gangs were recruited from immigrant Irish, poor Southern whites, and poor Southern blacks, while the Western crews came mostly from China. The Union Pacific was said to be sustained by tea (Douglas 110).

Nile the Easterners were racing through the prairie, the Nesters were striping foothill forests, painfully bridging, tunneling, and inching up the mountains. Working summer and Inter, it took the Central Pacific two years to hurdle the barrier of the Sierras. A thousand miles back East, the Irish Norse frequently fainted in the midsummer heat, but their employers were kept going by the money they would receive from the government upon completion of the transcontinental railroad. Ninth the Westerners over the Sierras, and the Easterners over the Rocky Mountains, the two armies slogged along the sage toward each other.

When the two crews came within sight of each other, the Irish turned to their fists to slow down the Chinese. Ere Chinese resorted to pick axes, which in turn brought the Irish to use their guns. The Chinese finally gave in and the sighting was stopped (Mere 456). On May 10, 1869 the two rails met at a spot in Utah that was named Promontory Point. The crews had laid 1, 775 miles of track in just over three years. Five days later, a special Central Pacific train arrived carrying company executives, engineers, and state dignitaries. Three days later, the Union Pacific train infantry, and a regimental band.

It promised to be a gallant and decorative ceremony. But in the course of their labor the crew had collected a more colorful assortment of interested parties: saloon keepers, gamblers, whore's, money lenders, odd-job rovers. And these, with the cooks and dishwashers from the dormitory trains, made up the welcoming party. ' (Douglas 121) Five states had sent along gold and silver spikes for the official ceremony. The chosen symbol for the ceremony

was a golden spike which was to be driven in by the Governor of California, Leland Stanford. The band stopped playing and a prayer was said.

The telegraph operator was connected with San Francisco and New York and was ready to send the first coast-to-coast commentary. It was a single sentence, 'Stand by, we have done praying,' (Mere 461). Then the Governor of California lifted the sledge hammer above his head and brought it down to meet the rail. He had missed the spike, but the telegraph operator had already sent the message and New York fired a hundred gun salute, Philadelphia rang the Liberty Bell, and a San Francisco paper announced the 'annexation of the United States,' (Cooke 218).

The country might take to the railroad as a novelty and a link between the Great Plains and the people who would want, or could be urged, to settle it,' (Cooke 229). The years 1870-1900 were a period of enormous growth in the United States. During those years, 430 million acres of land were settled, which was more than had been occupied in all preceding American history. A considerable part of this expansion was in the Great Plains. (Cited States of America' 472). This enormous expansion was the product of a combination of forces.

One was the Homestead Act of 1862. The Homestead Act of 1862 was passed by the government to encourage farming in the Midwest. The government offered any head of family or person over twenty-one, either citizen or alien who wished to become a citizen, a 160 acre section of land. The recipient paid a small fee and agreed to live on the homestead or cultivate it for five years (Mere 236). In addition to the Homestead Act, there was the

<https://assignbuster.com/how-did-the-transcontinental-railroad-affect-assignment/>

realization on the part of informed people that the era of well-watered, free land was drawing to a close.

A warning had been given in 1880 by the Director of the Census that the era of free land was closing horn 130). The swift expansion across the Great Plains was, in part, a rush of American farmers who wanted to take part in free Nas the sale of land by states at attractive prices. School lands, university lands, and other state lands were put on the market in competition with homesteads. He chief factor, however, in this swift Westward colonization was the railroad companies. All of them were eager to transport settlers to the vast prairie, to get it colonized as matter of developing traffic.

The land-grant railroads had their own areas to sell. But, they also aggressively advertised the free homestead lands of the federal government. The main objective was to build up settlement as a means of creating freight to carry. The prices at which railroad lands were sold ' aired according to location and soil from five to twenty dollars or more an acre with easy credit terms. Many settlers preferred railroad lands that were favorably located over free homesteads. Railroad companies, especially those possessing land grants, were colonizers of the Great Plains on a large scale.

They carried forward on a vast scale the work that had been done on a lesser scale by colonizing companies on the seaboard during the colonial period.

Ere Great Plains were advertised with extraordinary enthusiasm. The Northern Pacific Railroad kept eight hundred agents in various European countries distributing literature and European language, especially to areas

in which there were droughts or bad soil. Western railroads had agents in New York City to receive immigrants; they offered special immigrant rates to the West, and they gave new arrivals advice on where to settle and about the best methods of farming.

The railroad enterprise was one of the most important aspects of the history of the West since the Civil War, and the reason the story is not emphasized more in summary accounts is that the story has so far been told only for individual railroads. In an all-out campaign to lure settlers, railroad land offices churned out reams of propaganda that painted the prairies and plains as a veritable paradise. (Horn 194) Railroads were not always scrupulous in their colonization methods.

They permitted their New York agents to use dubious means of enticing immigrants coming off steamboats to settle on their lands. Some were said to have stolen trainloads of immigrants from each other. High-pressure salesmanship was used in disposing of lands to prospective settlers.

Rapturous tales were told about what the land would grow. The climate of the plains was misrepresented. Lay Cooke, the financier of the Northern Pacific had weather maps place of warm winters in order to counteract the impression that the region of the Northern Pacific was a harshly cold country. The Northern Pacific was thereafter wittily referred to by newspapers as Jay Cooke's Banana Belt. Lack of rainfall was known to be a crucial problem on the Northern Plains. The whole region is an area of semi-aridity and of climatic cycles. A series of wet years occurs when the annual rainfall is somewhat more than twenty inches; then a dry series follows, bringing years of

droughts. It so happened that the five years prior to 1887 were a wet series on the Great Plains, “ hen Kansas, Nebraska, and South Dakota had fairly frequent rainfall.