

The Impact of the Transcontinental Railroad on post-Civil War America

NEH Lesson Plan for TCRR July 2013

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Below is my curriculum project. It culminates with a DBQ. I also tried to establish a foundation of earlier activities and assignments before getting to the DBQ assessment. I could not attach some of the word documents that I discussed below but I would be happy to e-mail those of you that are interested, please contact historyproject@ucdavis.edu

California State Standard(s):

11.1 Students analyze the significant events in the founding of the nation and its attempts to realize the philosophy of government described in the Declaration of Independence.

4. Students examine the effects of the Civil War and Reconstruction and of the industrial revolution including demographic shifts and the emergence in the late 19th Century of the United States as a world power.”

AP US history Topic Standard 14

Development of the West in the late 19th Century”

Historical Investigation/guiding question:

“California’s ‘Big Four’ and their Union/Southern Pacific company made a positive impact on post Civil War American society.” To what extent is this statement true? In your response, make sure to address social, political and economic factors. Use the attached documents and your knowledge of the years 1861-1893 in formulating your response.

Please note: Though this is the guiding question for student historical inquiry, it also serves as an in class DBQ so I would not give students access to this question before they write their DBQ. Coverage of the Big Four in my AP US class will likely be in December and by that point students should be able to write an in class DBQ on a prompt not provided to them beforehand.



Objectives for student learning:

- Working in pairs, students will actively respond to “The Past and Present of the Transcontinental Railroad” activity.
- Working individually, students will complete an “entry ticket” of at least 50 words in response to the homework readings (see below).
- Working first in pairs and possibly individually for homework, students will use the “CAAMPS Document Analysis Worksheet” in analyzing a number of documents from the “Colton Letters.”
- Individually, students will write a DBQ essay in response to the guiding question that includes a thesis statement and breakdown of at least five of the documents.

Total Class Time for investigative question: 3-6 days including DBQ

One could cut one day out by skipping the “Iron Road” video. I’ve extended the time to six days due to attached lectures. Parts of multiple days would likely be used covering those within the actual unit of study. Time constraints are of course a major concern in AP US history and daily planning is again here up to the individual teacher.

Though the DBQ is the culminating activity and assessment, I would use the prompt and documents as a means of “backward planning” and form my background activities in close connection to the Document Based Question assignment.

Day One:

Handout/activity: “The Past and Present of the Transcontinental Railroad” from the UC Davis History Project

- To begin class, place the following terms on the board: **Old Town Sacramento, Chinatown, Stanford University, and Colfax or Dutch Flat (your call), California.**
- Pass out the UCD History Project handout and have students work in pairs to determine whether each location is “Alive Today,” “A Living Memory,” “Simply a Memory,” or a “Forgotten Part of the Past.” Give students about 7-10 minutes to record their notes. Then, come together for a 5-10 minute class discussion.

Powerpoint lectures: July, 2013 summer seminar Transcontinental Railroad course (Professors Kelman and Rauchway)

- Lectures are attached. Teacher shall use their own discretion in regards to how much detail and coverage will be addressed in class. In regards to the actual lesson, with this being a college style AP US class, the lecture and discussion could take the rest of the period. Period length at one’s school would also play a role and again this would be a teacher decision as to how much time should be spent on this activity.



<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/zxp0p0il4fpo7iz/6bk21N8ay/TCRR/american%20system%20lecture.ppt>

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/zxp0p0il4fpo7iz/Q5uBwRLLT0/TCRR/america%20after.ppt>

End of Day One: Play the first 5-10 minutes of the PBS video: “American Experience: The Iron Road” with guided questions.

- The video was produced in 1990 and only on VHS. This is an optional step and thus guided questions are not included here. The video would definitely provide students with an unbiased, strong overview of the Big Four and their impact but if one is pressed for time or unable to get access to the video, the background lessons/DBQ assessment may certainly be completed without it.

Homework Day One: Students will read two secondary sources: “Rails to the Pacific” and “The Big Four” from the California State Railroad Museum website (see link below) and complete the “Close Reading” questions.

<http://www.csrnf.org/explore-and-learn/railroad-history/the-transcontinental-railroad>

Day Two:

Entry Ticket: Begin class with an “entry ticket” activity about last night’s homework.

- Teachers could have students complete this assignment either on binder paper or provide index cards to each student as they enter the room. Entry ticket assignments can have a very specific prompt or an open ended one. For example, a teacher might ask a specific question like: “From last night’s reading, has your historical opinion of the Big Four improved, stayed the same or taken a more negative turn?” Or, a more open ended entry ticket could have the teacher ask students to write for three consecutive minutes beginning with the phrase: “From last night’s readings on the Transcontinental Railroad,…” “Entry ticket” responses should start with around a 50 word requirement and build from there. After the writing period is over, teachers have several options: Students could share their responses in pairs with a whole class discussion coming after. Or, if facing time constraints, a teacher could skip the pair sharing step and go straight to the whole class discussion. Teachers also have the option of collecting the note cards (possibly as a sort of homework check or low stakes quiz) or can tell the students to hold onto their responses. The whole activity should take between 10-15 minutes.

Finish PBS film: “American Experience: The Iron Road” with guided questions



Activity: “How to Buy a Senator: The Letters that Tell All.”

- Jeff Pollard provides all that a teacher needs in his outstanding lesson though the teacher will have to decide how many documents to cover from the packet. I also really like the **CAAMPS Documents Analysis Worksheet** that is included in the packet.

Day Two Homework: Lots of possibilities here: For those that skipped “The Iron Road” video, they could be at a point where they would want their students to wrap up the CAAMPS Worksheet and be ready to write the DBQ in class tomorrow. Others might want to take more time on the CAAMPS worksheet and spend a third class day on it and then write the DBQ on the 4th day. Those using “The Iron Road” video will absolutely need a third day for the CAAMPS activity and then a Day Four to write the DBQ. Extended use and discussion of the earlier lectures may also extend lesson plan days before students complete the DBQ assignment.

Day Three or Four: DBQ ESSAY

Prompt: “California’s ‘Big Four’ and their Union/Southern Pacific company made a positive impact on post Civil War American society.” To what extent is this statement true? In your response, make sure to address social, political and economic factors. Use the attached documents and your knowledge of the years 1861-1893 in formulating your response.

Document A: Secondary Source: Text about Republican Civil War goals for the west (Heather Cox Richardson: The Greatest Nation of the Earth: Republican Economic Policies During the Civil War 1997)

“The 1856 and 1860 Republican platforms called for the railroad not on military or postal grounds, but because a railroad to the Pacific was ‘imperatively demanded by the interests of the whole country’... In many ways, the impulse behind the creation of a transcontinental railroad epitomized Republican thought. A railroad to the Pacific, Republicans argued, would help to develop the country’s agricultural base and thus create a great commercial nation, which would advance far beyond the countries of Europe. Wartime necessity bolstered the general Republican desire for a transcontinental railroad. The need to protect the West Coast encouraged Republican support for the 1862 act and in 1864 the nation’s desperate need for gold and the swelling immigration West added to the Republican belief in nurturing the nation’s progress. .. Republican believed that the transcontinental railroad would make American ‘the greatest nation of the earth.’”

Document B: The Golden Spike: May 10th, 1869

<http://www.gilderlehrman.org/collections/00ac0a87-a8dd-4632-bb26-300913165143?>



Document C: Secondary Source: Excerpt from Richard White's *Railroaded* (published in 2011) in reference to the 1860's Big Four and Central Pacific Corporation

"The Central Pacific paid the Contract and Finance Company inflated prices for constructing the line. The Pacific Railway Commission later estimated that the Central Pacific paid roughly twice the actual cost of construction per mile. In 1868, the Contract and Finance Company received half of its \$16,512,000 payment in gold and half in stock in the Central Pacific. This meant that the gold covered the cost of the line and the stock was a bonus. Other transfers in which the Contract and Finance Company received bonds as well as stock were more lucrative still. It was, as Collis P. Huntington wrote years later 'as rotten a corporation as ever lived.'"

Document D: Excerpt from the "Colton Letters" (January 14th, 1876) Written by Collis Huntington to Southern Pacific Lobbyist David D. Colton

Friend Colton:

I received your telegram that Wm. B. Carr (Washington lobbyist) has had for his services \$60,000 S.P. bonds; then asking how much more I think his services are worth for the future. In view of the many things we have now before Congress, it is very important that his friends in Washington should be with us, and if that could be brought about by paying Carr say \$10,000 to \$20,000 per year, I think we could afford to do it, but of course not until he had controlled his friends. I would like to have you get a written proposition from Carr, in which he would agree to control his friends for a fixed sum, then send it to me.

Document E: Secondary source: Richard Orsi "The Mussel Slough Affair" (published 2005) in reference to the 1880 "Battle of Mussel Slough."

"Beginning in December 1879, (Judge Lorenzo) Sawyer handed down orders of eviction and financial judgments against all of the squatters. The judge ruled that the railroad's altered route had been legal; its title to the land had been perfected with the 1867 filing of its revised route; settlers arriving on the land after that date had no standing to attack the railroad's title... The (Southern Pacific) company still hoping for a peaceful settlement, delayed asking the judge to send marshals to enforce the orders and actually evict the squatters. Until this point, the squatters, insisting that the Southern Pacific's land titles were flawed, refused to pay any price for the land."



Document F: Political Cartoon from The WASP: “The Curse of California” Published August 19th, 1882. <http://www.stanford.edu/group/spatialhistory/cgi-bin/railroaded/gallery/drawings#lightbox=gallery/drawings/curse-california>

Document G: Speech to the workingmen of San Francisco on August 16, 1888

<http://sheg.stanford.edu/chinese-immigration-exclusion>

We have met here in San Francisco to-night to raise our voice to you in warning of a great danger that seems to us imminent, and threatens our almost utter destruction as a prosperous community; and we beg of each and every citizen of the State, without distinction of political party, depending on their own labor for the support of themselves and families, to hear us and to take time to examine with the utmost care the reasons and the facts we will give for believing a great danger to be now confronting us....

The danger is, that while we have been sleeping in fancied security, believing that the tide of Mongolian immigration to our State had been checked and was in a fair way to be entirely stopped, our opponents, the pro-China wealthy men of the land, have been wide-awake and have succeeded in reviving the importation of this servile slave-labor to almost its former proportions. So that, now, hundreds and thousands of Mongolians are every week flocking into our State....

To-day every avenue to labor, of every sort, is crowded with Chinese slave labor worse than it was eight years ago. The boot, shoe, and cigar industries are almost entirely in their hands. In the manufacture of men’s overalls and women’s and children’s underwear they run over three thousand sewing machines night and day. They monopolize nearly all the farming done to supply the market with all sorts of vegetables. This state of things brings about a terrible competition between our own people, who must live, if they live at all, in accord with American civilization, and the labor of a people, who live like what in fact they are, degraded serfs under masters who hold them in slavery. We should all understand that this state of things cannot be much longer endured.

Document H: Photo “The Battle of Wounded Knee” (December 29th, 1890)

<http://hoist.hrtc.net/~arabento/woundedknee.htm>



Document I: Excerpt: Frederick Jackson Turner: “The Significance of the Frontier” (1893)

<http://www.stanford.edu/group/west/cgi-bin/pager.php?id=25>

The exploitation of the beasts took hunter and trader to the west, the exploitation of the grasses took the rancher west, and the exploitation of the virgin soil of the river valleys and prairies attracted the farmer. Good soils have been the most continuous attraction to the farmer’s frontier. The land hunger of the Virginians drew them down the rivers into Carolina, in early colonial days; the search for soils took the Massachusetts men to Pennsylvania and to New York. As the eastern lands were taken up migration flowed across them to the west... .

From the conditions of frontier life came intellectual traits of profound importance... .That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good and for evil, and withal that buoyancy and exuberance which comes with freedom—these are traits of the frontier, or traits called out elsewhere because of the existence of the frontier. Since the days when the fleet of Columbus sailed into the waters of the New World, America has been another name for opportunity, and the people of the United States have taken their tone from the incessant expansion which has not only been open but has even been forced upon them... . [N]ever again will such gifts of free land offer themselves. For a moment, at the frontier, the bonds of custom are broken and unrestraint is triumphant... . And now, four centuries from the discovery of America, at the end of a hundred years of life under the Constitution, the frontier has gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American history.