

Prompt 6.15 - The Transcontinental Railroad

Warm-up: Think of technology that you would like to invent. How could it be both good and bad?

The Pony Express

Communication for much of US History was slow. There were no telephones, planes, or internet. To send a message across the country, people needed **couriers** (deliverers). One of the most famous courier services was none other than “The Pony Express.”

Mail typically took either three weeks on the Overland Trail or 3 months by boat through Panama. The Pony Express was able to get mail across 2,000 miles of desert and mountains in just 10 days. The Pony express had about 153 stations, 80 riders, and 500 horses to carry mail.

Each rider would ride on horseback for 75 miles and then pass off mail to the next rider at a home station. Between each home station, riders would stop every 10 miles at a relay station to hop onto a fresh horse.



Most riders were young men, including “Buffalo Bill” Cody who was known for his famous wild west shows. Riders needed to be small, able to travel through rough terrain, and avoid the Paiute Native Americans, who increasingly attacked in defense of their land. For years the Pony Express was the best way to communicate across the country. However, this would all change with the invention of the telegraph and the transcontinental railroad.

Describe how the Pony Express worked and the difficulties they faced in delivering messages.

The Transcontinental Railroad



In 1836, Congress passed a bill which helped Americans become leaders in technology. The **patent** (rights to inventions) bill made it easier for inventors to make new inventions without fear of someone stealing their ideas. After the bill, there were 600 times more patents issued for inventions.

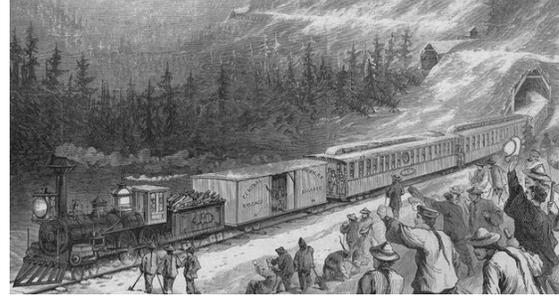
Between 1800 and 1900, the population of the country grew from 5 million to 75 million. Many of these people wanted to move out west for new opportunities, and a world-changing invention would help them do so. The steam engine was invented, which led to the first train in 1828. For the first time, people did not need to rely on waterways for transportation--a machine would do it.

By 1862, Congress then decided to tackle one of the most ambitious projects in US history. They passed the **Pacific Railroad Act**. This put The Central Pacific and Union Pacific Railroad Companies in competition with each other. Congress paid them to build as much railroad as possible in order to connect the east coast with the west coast. For each mile of railroad, they would receive up to \$48,000 dollars.

What two things did Congress do to help create The Transcontinental Railroad? How did they help?

Chinese Americans

Building the railroads across the entire country was an enormous undertaking. The Union Pacific Company had less difficulties since they were building across the flat prairie while Central Pacific needed to build through “Donner Pass” in the Rocky Mountains.



The Union Pacific railroads were largely built by Irish and German immigrants but few were willing to work for the Central Pacific Railroad company in the Rockies. Eventually, the company put its racism aside and agreed to hire Chinese American immigrants, as they were the only ones willing to do the hard work after fleeing their own Civil War in China.

Railroad work was harsh, the conditions were poor, and workers had to work through The American Civil War. The Union Pacific workers suffered violent attacks from Native American tribes like the Sioux, Arapho, and Cheyenne, who saw their native lands threatened by American intruders.

Chinese immigrants working for “Central Pacific” were forced to blow holes through The Rocky Mountains during winter using explosives. To tunnel through a mountain, one worker would hold a drill while the other swung an eighteen-pound sledgehammer into the granite rock. Once the hole was one foot deep, they would put a highly unstable explosive, known as nitroglycerin, in the hole and blow it up. Handling explosives was dangerous and accidents would frequently occur. Cave-ins, avalanches, and simply being blown up were all risks.

Working conditions were also poor. Hauling tons of rock through 30 feet across Donner Pass was crippling. Chinese workers were forced to work 6 days a week and 8 hours a day for half the pay of Irish or German Americans. Additionally, chinese workers needed to pay for their own food and housing while frequently being abused by their supervisors. Eventually Chinese Americans decided to **strike** (refuse work) until conditions improved. In response, The Central Pacific company starved workers until the strike ended. However, conditions did improve after the strike.

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Why were Chinese Americans hired and what difficulties did they face in completing the railroad?

Cooldown: What are ways in which companies and workers need, or do not need, the government for help? Use the Transcontinental Railroad to help you answer your question.