

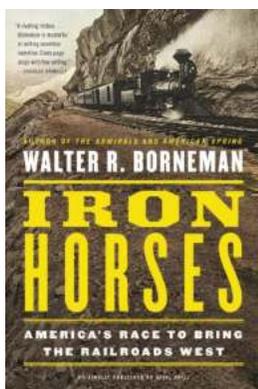
# The Epic Race of America's Railroads Expansion Westward

The 19th century was a pivotal time period in American history, marked by the epic race to bring railroads to the West. This ambitious endeavor greatly shaped the nation, connecting the East and West coasts and opening up new opportunities for settlement, trade, and economic growth. This article explores the incredible challenges faced by those involved, their determination, and the resulting impact on the development of the United States.

## Advancing Westward: A Nation Divided by Distance

At the start of the 1800s, the United States was a vast and untamed land, spanning thousands of miles. However, the lack of infrastructure hindered efficient transportation and restricted opportunities for expansion. Recognizing the need for better connectivity, visionaries across the nation contemplated the idea of a transcontinental railroad.

Several potential routes were proposed, each with its own advantages and obstacles. The most prominently debated routes were the northern route, utilizing the vast prairies of the Midwest, and the southern route, which would traverse the rugged Rocky Mountains.



## Iron Horses: America's Race to Bring the Railroads West by Walter R. Borneman (Kindle Edition)

★★★★☆ 4.2 out of 5

Language : English  
File size : 15012 KB  
Text-to-Speech : Enabled  
Screen Reader : Supported  
Enhanced typesetting : Enabled

Word Wise : Enabled  
Print length : 369 pages



## **The Birth of a Race: The Construction Begins**

In 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Pacific Railroad Act, providing federal support for the construction of the transcontinental railroad. This act served as a catalyst for intense competition between The Central Pacific Railroad Company, responsible for laying tracks from Sacramento, California, eastward, and the Union Pacific Railroad Company, working to build from Omaha, Nebraska, westward.

The race to lay tracks commenced, with both companies facing monumental challenges. The Central Pacific had to contend with the daunting Sierra Nevada mountain range, while the Union Pacific had to overcome the treacherous Rocky Mountains and extensive Indigenous territories. The labor force, consisting mainly of immigrant workers, faced hazardous conditions as they hammered through mountains, carved through canyons, and bridged rivers and valleys.

## **The Human Triumph: Overcoming Adversity**

The race quickly escalated into a fierce competition, fueling rapid construction. The Central Pacific and Union Pacific kept pushing their boundaries, spurring each other on through a combination of financial incentives and pride.

Workers faced adversity at every turn. Extreme weather conditions, including blistering heat, freezing cold, and torrential rains, presented significant hurdles. Moreover, they had to deal with the constant threat of accidents, sickness, and

Native American attacks. The sheer resilience and determination of those involved in this monumental undertaking cannot be overstated.

As the railroads forged westward, makeshift towns sprung up along the construction routes. These towns, known as "Hell on Wheels," served as essential hubs for workers and supplies. They were wild, lawless places, filled with saloons, gambling parlors, and temporary housing for laborers working to bring the railroads closer to completion.

### **The Golden Spike: A Symbolic Unification**

The nation watched with bated breath as the two railroads raced to meet at Promontory Summit, Utah, in May 1869. On that historic day, representatives laid the final tracks, and as the last spike was driven into the ground, the East and West coasts were officially connected.

The event was marked by the driving of the golden spike, made of precious metals from both ends of the country. This symbolic gesture represented a triumph of engineering, human will, and national unity. The railroads had fulfilled their purpose, revolutionizing transportation and communication, and changing the nation forever.

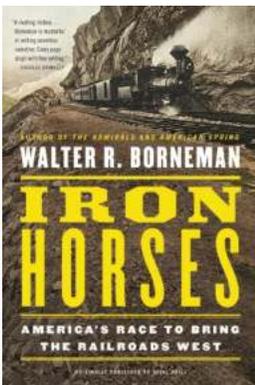
### **Legacy of the Race: Westward Expansion and Beyond**

The completion of the transcontinental railroad resulted in a dramatic transformation of the United States. It enabled faster and more efficient transportation of people and goods, linking the nation's resources and markets. Settlements flourished along the rail lines, and new industries emerged, contributing to the nation's economic boom.

The railroads played a crucial role in westward expansion, attracting homesteaders, adventurers, and entrepreneurs seeking new opportunities. In turn, this led to the displacement of Indigenous communities and the further colonization of the West.

Furthermore, the railroads proved vital during wartime, facilitating the movement of troops and supplies. They also stimulated tourism, as people now had the means to explore the diverse landscapes of America.

The race to bring the railroads west was an audacious endeavor that forever changed the course of American history. Despite facing numerous perils and hardships, the Central Pacific and Union Pacific Railroad companies succeeded in connecting the East and West coasts, uniting the nation. The transcontinental railroad remains a remarkable testament to human ingenuity, determination, and the power of collaboration.



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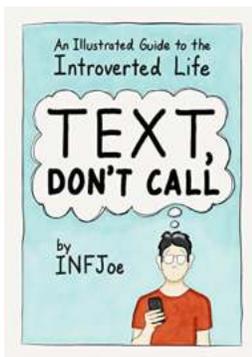


A "masterly" account of the origins of the transcontinental railroad (Douglas Brinkley) by the author of the bestselling *The Admirals*.

After the completion of the first transcontinental railroad in 1869, the rest of the United States was up for grabs, and the race was on. The prize: a better, shorter, less snowy route through the American Southwest, linking Los Angeles to Chicago.

In *Iron Horses*, Borneman recounts the rivalries, contested routes, political posturing, and business dealings that unfolded as an increasing number of lines pushed their way across the country. Borneman brings to life the legendary robber barons behind it all and also captures the herculean efforts required to construct these roads -- the laborers who did the back-breaking work, the brakemen who ran atop moving cars, the tracklayers crushed and killed by runaway trains.

From backroom deals in Washington, DC, to armed robberies of trains in the wild deserts, from cattle cars to streamliners and Super Chiefs, all the great incidents and innovations of a mighty American era are made vivid in *Iron Horses*.



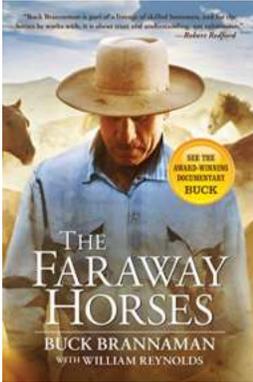
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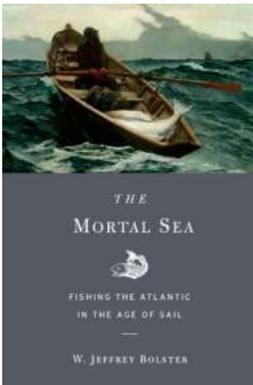
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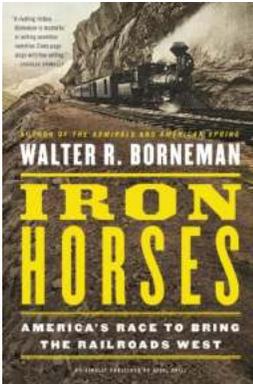
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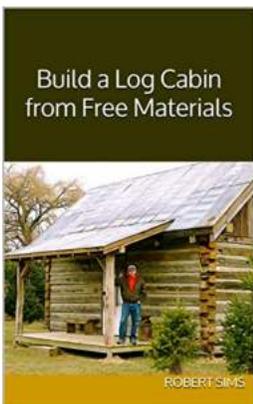
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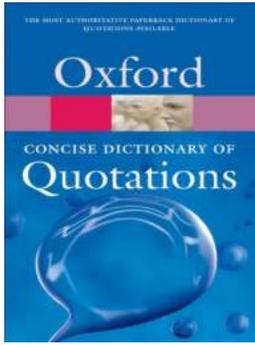
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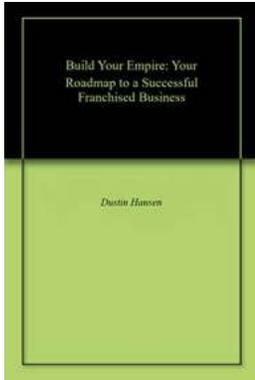
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