



economic initiative
ideals

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DISCUSSION & REVIEW QUESTIONS:

- Towards the beginning of the video, Professor Guelzo examines the previous types of revolutions and notes: "...the Americans did not propose merely overthrowing a monarchy. They proposed ending the very idea of monarchy as a worthwhile form of government. In America, the citizen, not the government or the king, would hold the keys to power. With this overturning of the old way of doing things, the rebels made the political systems of Europe look as antiquated and irrational as fully as Newton's laws had made medieval physics look antiquated and irrational." What do you think motivated the founders to attempt a brand new, untested model of governing? How do you think that the founders came up with such a brilliant new model? Explain. In what ways, specifically, did the new American model of governing make the European ones look so old and irrational? Explain.
- Continuing on the point of doing away with a monarchy-style of government, Professor Guelzo also points out: "Tearing up the old order meant more than just refusing to take political orders from kings, dukes and princes. It meant taking no economic orders from them, either. In a society of free and equal citizens, Americans would follow their own economic initiative. They would be as free economically as they were politically." What, exactly, do you think Professor Guelzo means by the term "economic initiative"? Why do you think having economic freedom was so important to the new style of government being able to work, and to work so well? Explain.
- Professor Guelzo then explains: "This small government model meant the state was to interfere as little as possible in the citizen's life. Americans founded the only country ever to be based on the principle of restraining the government. And that unleashed such dynamic economic growth, it took America from a fledgling state to a world power in just fifty years." What do you think the relationship is between a restrained, lessened government and dynamic economic growth- i.e. why does less government translate into a booming, healthy economy (and, thus, significantly more power for that nation)? Explain.
- Later in the video, Professor Guelzo further points out: "The sheer novelty of the Revolution's first two legs, the political and the economic, was so great that many Americans, such as Yale President Timothy Dwight, expressed a desire not merely to remake the North American continent, but the rest of the world as well. America, Dwight wrote in a popular poem of the time, was destined to 'Hush the tumult of war, and give peace to the world.' But the Founders rejected this view. The United States was to be a republic, not an empire; a beacon, not a kingdom." What do you think President Dwight meant by his poetic passage? Why do you think that the founders were adamant about the U.S. being a model for other nations, but not imposing that model onto other nations forcibly? Explain.
- At the end of the video, Professor Guelzo concludes: "...the wonder of America, from its founding to this day, is not that it has stumbled; the wonder is that Americans have stumbled as infrequently as they have. And managed to make and keep America the strongest and freest country in the world. That birthday Thomas Paine proclaimed is still very much worth celebrating. If it isn't celebrated, it will be lost. And that would be a tragedy- for America, and for the world." Do you agree that the founding of the U.S. is still worthy of celebrating? Why or why not? What do you think Professor Guelzo means when he states that if the founding of the U.S. model of governing isn't celebrated that it will be lost, and why would that be a tragedy? Explain.

EXTEND THE LEARNING:

CASE STUDY: The Transcontinental Railroad

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the article “10 Ways the Transcontinental Railroad Changed America,” then answer the questions that follow.

- Prior to May 10, 1969, how long would it take someone to travel from the East Coast to the West Coast, and how would that person have to travel? The completion of the Transcontinental Railroad shortened the trip from New York to San Francisco to how long? How many workers laid the 1,776 miles of track, and who were they? In today's money, how much did the project cost? How did the completion of the line affect California? How much freight was the line carrying by 1880? What was the basis for the rapid expansion of American industry and agriculture? How much less expensive was a coast-to-coast trip after the line was built, in terms of cost percentage? How did the Transcontinental Railroad alter Americans' perception of reality? Who started the first mail-order catalogue business, and what made it possible? What put pressure on the labor market after the line was completed? Who were “the Big Four,” and what was their financial relationship with the U.S. government? What did the Transcontinental Railroad become a symbol of, for Americans?
- How do you think the small government of the time contributed towards being able to achieve such an endeavor? Do you think it was worth it to build a transcontinental railroad? Why or why not? What type of infrastructure do you think could be built today that would also stimulate the economy so well?
- Which facts in the article support which points made in the video? Considering the spectacular success of the U.S., why do you think that some countries still follow other models of governance? Explain.



QUIZ

WHAT WAS REVOLUTIONARY ABOUT THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

1. Who described the American Revolution as “The birthday of a new world?”
 - a. John Quincy Adams
 - b. Thomas Jefferson
 - c. Thomas Paine
 - d. Benjamin Franklin

2. The American Revolution was something that, _____, the world had never seen.
 - a. politically
 - b. economically
 - c. diplomatically
 - d. all of the above

3. Like the rebellions in Britain, the goal of the American revolution was to extort new protections and privileges from the existing regime.
 - a. True
 - b. False

4. The new American model of restrained government took the country from a fledgling state to a world power in just how many years?
 - a. 50
 - b. 60
 - c. 70
 - d. 80

5. The ‘wonder’ of America is that _____.
 - a. Americans have permanently imposed their governing principles on so many other nations with such spectacular success
 - b. Americans keep changing their values so frequently
 - c. such a high percentage of Americans agree on everything
 - d. Americans have managed to make and keep America the strongest and freest country in the world



QUIZ - ANSWER KEY

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<https://www.history.com/news/transcontinental-railroad-changed-america>



Ed Vebell/Getty Images

There was a time when traveling from the East Coast to the West Coast meant riding for months in a horse-drawn wagon or stagecoach, or sailing southward to Panama and then crossing the Isthmus to board another ship for a journey up the other coast. But that all changed on May 10, 1869, when railroad baron Leland Stanford whacked in a ceremonial gold spike to mark the joining together of the tracks of the Central Pacific Railroad and the Union Pacific Railroad in Promontory, Utah, to form the transcontinental railroad. The new rail connection eventually made it possible to travel in a train car from New York to San Francisco in just a week's time.

Some 21,000 workers—from Irish-American Civil War veterans, freed slaves and Mormon pioneers to Chinese laborers—had been recruited to perform the hard and often dangerous work of laying the 1,776 miles of track. By one estimate, the project cost roughly \$60 million, about \$1.2 billion in today's money, though other sources put the amount even higher.

While the railroad's construction was a mammoth undertaking, its effects on the country were equally profound. Here are some of the ways that the first transcontinental railroad—and the many other transcontinental lines that followed it—changed America.



Map of the transcontinental route of the Atlantic & Pacific Railroad and its connections, circa 1883. Buyenlarge/Getty Images

1. It made the Western U.S. more important.

“What the transcontinental railroad did was bring the West into the world, and the world into the West,” explains James P. Ronda, a retired University of Tulsa history professor and co-author, with Carlos Arnaldo Schwantes, of *The West the Railroads Made*. In particular, it helped turn California from a once-isolated place to a major economic and political force, and helped lead to the state’s rapid growth.

2. It made commerce possible on a vast scale.

By 1880, the transcontinental railroad was transporting \$50 million worth of freight each year. In addition to transporting western food crops and raw materials to East Coast markets and manufactured goods from East Coast cities to the West Coast, the railroad also facilitated international trade.

The first freight train to travel eastward from California carried a load of Japanese tea. “The Constitution provided the legal framework for a single national market for trade goods; the transcontinental railroad provided the physical framework,” explains Henry W. Brands, a history professor at the University of Texas at Austin, and author of *Dreams of El Dorado: A History of the American West*. “Together they gave the United States the single largest market in the world, which provided the basis for the rapid expansion of American industry and agriculture to the point where the U.S. by the 1890s had the most powerful economy on the planet.”



Building of the Transcontinental Railroad, circa 1869. Fotosearch/Getty Images

3. It made travel more affordable.

In the 1860s, a six-month stagecoach trip across the U.S. cost \$1,000 (about \$20,000 in today's dollars), according to the University of Houston's Digital History website. But once the railroad was built, the cost of a coast-to-coast trip became 85 percent less expensive. That made it possible for Americans to visit distant locales that previously they might only have heard about.

4. It changed where Americans lived.

During the railroad's construction, numerous temporary "hell on wheels" towns of tents and wooden shacks sprung up along the route to provide living quarters for workers. Most of them eventually disappeared, but others, such as Laramie, Wyoming, evolved into towns that provided rail terminals and repair facilities. Additionally, about 7,000 cities and towns across the country began as Union Pacific depots and water stops. And, as Ronda notes, the first transcontinental railroad and the other lines that followed made it easy for immigrants to spread across the nation. "People come across the Atlantic on ships, get on trains, and end up in places such as western Nebraska," he says.

5. It altered Americans' concept of reality.

In an 1872 article, naturalist John Muir wrote that the transcontinental railroad "annihilated" time and space. As Ronda explains, it changed the way that people viewed distances. "When you're walking or riding a horse, you experience the world one way, but when you're sitting in a railroad car, you see it differently," he says. "In the West, where the distances are so great, the railroad brought near and far closer together." The railroad schedules also helped to push the United States into changing how it marked time, leading to the adoption of standard time zones in 1883.



Construction of the Union Pacific section of the Transcontinental Railroad across Devil's Gate Bridge, Utah, circa 1869. PhotoQuest/Getty Images

6. It helped create the Victorian version of Amazon.

In 1872, just a few years after the transcontinental railroad's completion, Aaron Montgomery Ward started the first mail-order catalog business. As Ronda notes, the first transcontinental railroad—and other transcontinental lines that followed—made it possible to sell products far and wide without a physical storefront, and enabled people all over the country to furnish their homes and keep up with the latest fashion trends.

7. It took a heavy toll on the environment.

The massive amount of wood needed to build the railroad, including railroad ties, support beams for tunnels and bridges, and sheds, necessitated cutting down thousands of trees, which devastated western forests. Towns and cities that sprung up along the railroad further encroached upon what had been wild areas. And the railroad and other rail routes that followed made it easy for large numbers of hunters to travel westward and kill millions of buffalo. That slaughter impacted Native Americans, who had hunted buffalo in moderation, and weakened their resistance to settlement of the west.



Chinese immigrants working on the Northwest Pacific Railway in the 1880s. Bettmann Archive/Getty Images

8. It increased racial conflicts.

The completion of the transcontinental railroad led to heightened racial tensions in California, as white workers from the East Coast and Europe could more easily travel westward where immigrant laborers were prevalent, says Princeton University Assistant Professor of History Beth Lew-Williams, author of *The Chinese Must Go: Violence, Exclusion, and the Making of the Alien in America*.

Upon completion of the railroad, many Chinese workers returned to California in search of employment. "The flood of goods and laborers who arrived in the West, combined with the boom and bust economy of the late-19th century, put pressure on the labor market," she says. "The presence of Chinese immigrants did not create the economic uncertainties of the 1870s, but they were often blamed nonetheless."

Growing prejudice against and fear of the Chinese eventually manifested itself in Congress' passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the first of several laws that blocked Chinese laborers from entering the United States until 1943.

9. It pioneered government-financed capitalism.

The Central Pacific's "Big Four"—Stanford, Collis P. Huntington, Mark Hopkins, and Charles Crocker—figured out how to tap into government coffers to finance a business that otherwise wouldn't have been possible. As Richard White, author of *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America*, says, "They put little of their own money in it —they didn't have much. It was built on land grants, government loans, and government guaranteed bonds. When their loans came due, they refused to pay and the government had to sue. In effect, they stumbled into a business model where the public takes the risk and those taking the subsidies reap the gain."

Other entrepreneurs and industries would follow the Big Four's lead in tapping government help to build their businesses.

10. It instilled national confidence.

The transcontinental railroad had a major effect on how Americans perceived their nation, and it became a symbol of America's growing industrial power and a source of confidence that led them to take on even more ambitious quests. As Ronda says, "It's one of the transformative moments in American history."

By
Patrick J. Kiger