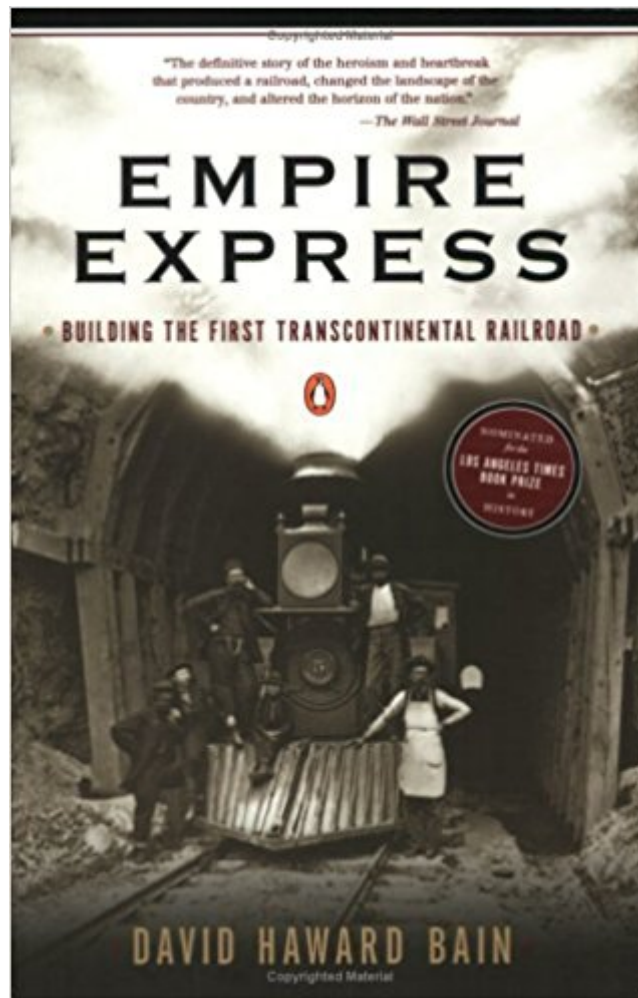




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Empire Express: Building The First Transcontinental Railroad



Synopsis

After the Civil War, the building of the transcontinental railroad was the nineteenth century's most transformative event. Beginning in 1842 with a visionary's dream to span the continent with twin bands of iron, *Empire Express* captures three dramatic decades in which the United States effectively doubled in size, fought three wars, and began to discover a new national identity. From self-made entrepreneurs such as the Union Pacific's Thomas Durant and era-defining figures such as President Lincoln to the thousands of laborers whose backbreaking work made the railroad possible, this extraordinary narrative summons an astonishing array of voices to give new dimension not only to this epic endeavor but also to the culture, political struggles, and social conflicts of an unforgettable period in American history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

On the morning of May 10, 1869, a gang of Irish immigrants met a party of Chinese laborers on a windy bluff northwest of Salt Lake City, Utah. Tired to the bone, the two groups laid down the last of countless wooden ties, bought at the exorbitant cost of six dollars apiece, and thus joined two great rail lines, the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific, to form a single transcontinental route. That rail line made possible the mass settlement of the West, and, as those who conceived it well knew, it changed the course of American history. David Haward Bain's superb narrative of westward rail history, weighing in at 800 pages, ends not with this great achievement but with the political and financial scandal that would almost overshadow it. Along the way Bain looks closely at the

entrepreneurial men who foresaw the possibilities of a vast nation joined by a steel ribbon--most memorably the hit-and-miss businessman Asa Whitney, who proposed to Congress an ingenious scheme to fund the building of the railroad through commercializing the right of way. Some of the men who came after Whitney, such as Mark Hopkins, Collis Huntington, and Leland Stanford, amassed great fortunes in realizing this dream. Others died penniless and nearly forgotten in the wake of political maneuverings and bad deals. Bain's vigorous, well-written narrative does much to restore those overlooked actors to history. --Gregory McNamee --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Uniting the country by a transcontinental railroad had a special resonance for the generation that had recently fought the Civil War. Bain's comprehensive study starts with the visionaries who conceived the idea during the two decades before the war (a mere 40 years after the Lewis and Clark expedition). As Bain (*Whose Woods These Are*) explains, the dreamers gave way to the engineers and entrepreneurs who fixed the route, assembled financing, drafted a work force and launched the two lines toward the eventual meeting point at Promontory Summit, Utah, in 1869. The story alternates between the Union Pacific driving west from Omaha and the Central Pacific blasting through the mountains from California. About a score of the principal players appear throughout the book, their triumphs and depredations interwoven in a richly (sometimes overly) detailed composition. Bain specifies his heroes and villains, and does not neglect the political fixers who infested Washington, D.C., emptying their satchels of money as they circulated through Congress. The writing is particularly evocative as Bain examines the impact of the railroad on the Plains Indians, whose traditional way of life was eradicated by the line. Bain also deals knowledgeably with the imported Chinese workers, the "Celestials," who were unsurpassed in their tenacity and work ethic. Displaying energetic research and enthusiasm for the subject matter, Bain brings the linking of the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, and the era that produced it, back to life. Maps. History Book Club selection; BOMC selection; 8-city author tour. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

As some of the reviews have stated this book has a lot of detail and NOT a lot of maps to help you keep on top of areas that are described. I had pages that got repeated in my download for some reason so I would be reading along and all of a sudden find myself reading a part that I had already been through a hundred pages back. This happened more than once and made the read kind of difficult as it was confusing at first and then caused me to have to skip through the repeats to get

back to the story. Good book though... Makes you want to take a good cross country rail trip to experience some of the vistas these guys saw and worked in.... Especially through the Sierras. Gave it 3 stars for lack of maps to go with the text.

In trying to explain the United States to a guest from overseas, I gave him a copy of this book and the Ken Burns "Civil War" series. The book drags a bit toward the end as the Credit Mobilier scandal is explored, but all-in-all this is a terrific book and a terrific subject. American History fans will not be disappointed. (I hope Dan Carlin does a podcast on this subject some day!)

As they say, truth is stranger than fiction. This massive work covers every possible aspect of this amazing project, and as an engineer I found the social aspects no less interesting than the technical. The machinations of a bunch of dishonest men, who ultimately succeeded in completing an enterprise which had much to contribute to the rise of America as a commercial giant. The only reason I withheld the fifth star is that, in being so comprehensive, the reading of such detailed description of much of the material became rather tedious. However, if a totally comprehensive version is what you want, I am sure there will never be a better book to read on this subject. I have also watched 2 DVD versions of the same story, and although entertaining, they do not cover the detail in a very satisfactory way. To truly follow the story, this book needs to be read!

Very enjoyable book and a nice read.

SUPER BOOK.

a1

This book is thick and long on detail. Many have complained that it lacks adequate maps and that it does not focus enough on the men on the ground who built the railroad. It is unfortunate that the publisher did not do a better job making clear exactly what this book is about. All of these complaints are true, but their stories are an aside to the topic of this book. The chapters dealing with things like the Chinese who built the railroad and the social changes caused by their immigration feel tacked on and not true to the subject of this book. Indeed all of the engineering and other gritty details about this great monument to ingenuity seem out of place because that is not what this book is about. What is it about? The struggle for money, power, and the behind the scenes politics that

went into the creation of the railroad. If you are interested in finance or 19th century history, then you may really enjoy this book. At its best, it focuses on the wealthy men who went from rich to supra-rich through this project. Their personalities and personal beliefs are explored in great detail. I read this because of my interest in the comparisons often made between the railroads and the internet as market bubbles. I learned a lot and was not at all disappointed. Again, only read this if you want to know about the finance, the politics, and the personalities.

Great. The best!

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