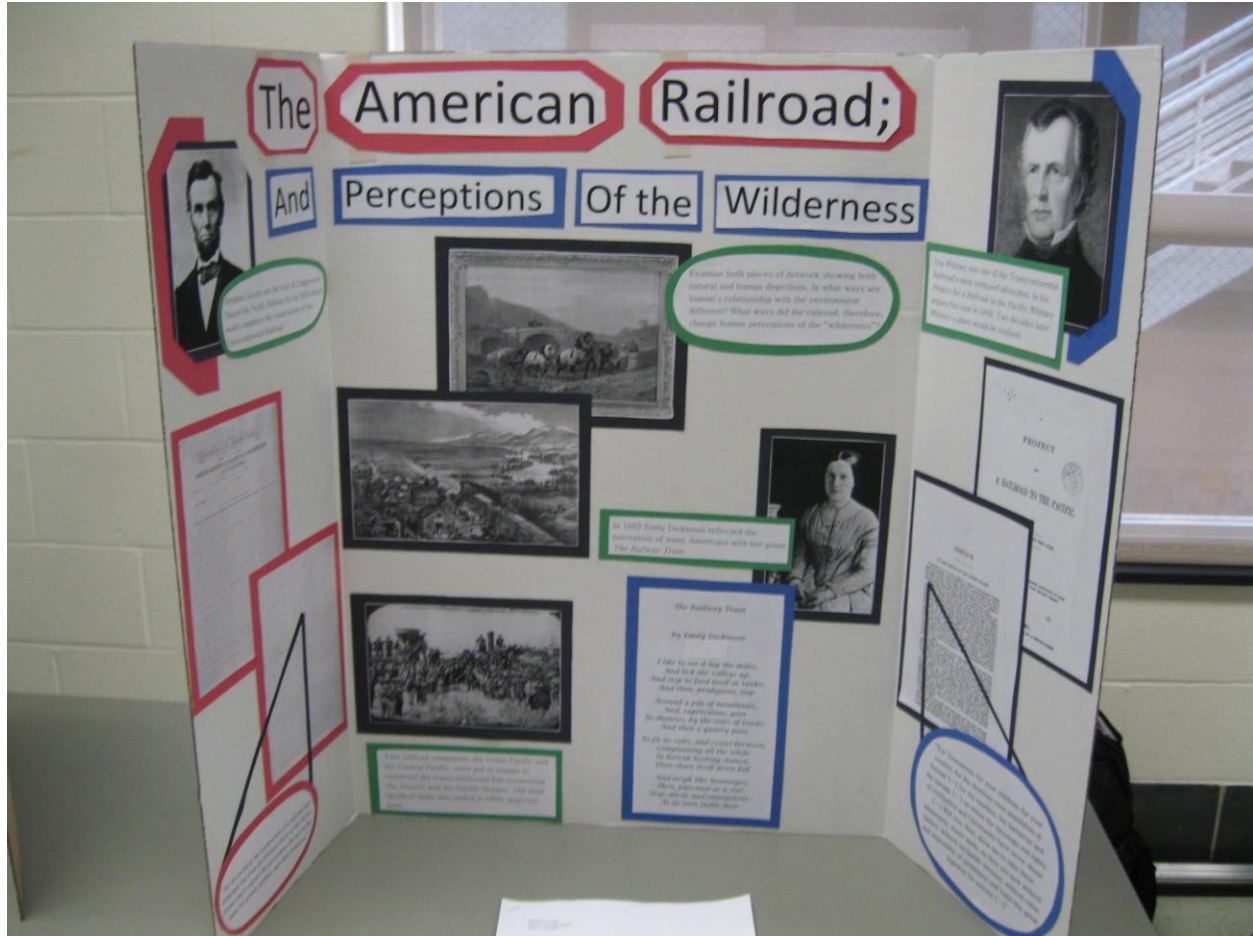


“The American Railroad: Perceptions of the Wilderness and Winning the West”

By:

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Railroads and the Industrial Revolution

The Industrial Revolution had a tremendous effect on technologies and economies as well as an important impact, on cultural perception. One of the most significant players in the Revolution's new industries was the development of the railroad. Indeed, the railroad, a major factor in industrialization, changed the landscape laterally as it unsympathetically carved through the terrain. This new and innovative transformation in transportation also changed commonly held conceptions and understandings of the landscape and nature.

The Pacific Railway Act and Manifest Destiny

The Pacific Railway Act would serve as the starting point of an American historic landmark: the Transcontinental Railroad. In the 1850s Congress constructed several topographical surveys throughout the West in order to establish what would serve as the ideal route for a railroad that would travel to the Pacific Coast. Two railroad companies, the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific, were put in charge to

construct the line. This westward expansion in the form of Manifest Destiny was certainly an ideal that was spread further due to the Transcontinental Railroad. Moreover, the common cause found in railroad construction was to make the west's acreage accessible to the "landless and the small farmers." The railroad experience was a new type of travel that could take Americans into, and bring them face to face with the western wilderness on an iron road. In fact, similar to Europe, Americans believed that "humans could and should 'improve' on nature." The American west was the mysterious wilderness that held the hopes and dreams of so many Americans. Railroad promoters, as every citizen, knew that American character and pride was seeded in the far reaching but no longer out of reach lands of the west.

The Growth of the American Railroad System

American railroads stretched throughout much of America and into the west in what seemed like no time. In the beginning, what seemed like a seed planted in the soil on which the few railways existed, grew a magnificent creation with branches that reached as far west as a person could travel. By 1860 there was a 30,000-mile iron network that "could be divided into nearly equal thirds: 10,000 miles in the eleven-state Northeast; 11,000 in the old Northwest-Midwest; and over 9,000 miles in the South." The growth of these railroad branches did not stop with the end of the Civil War; the years between 1880 and 1890 saw the most rapid expansive railroad growth in all of American history. "In that ten-year period, 7,030 miles of railroad a year were added." This amazing and unparalleled development totaled in 70,300 miles of train track laid over the country in a single decade.

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The American Railroad:
Perceptions of the Wilderness and Winning the West

“As in a crystal, there no longer is any true interior or exterior. We have been separated from nature, but we hardly feel it.” - Richard Lucae¹

Without a doubt the Industrial Revolution had tremendous effect on technologies and economies and just as, if not more important an impact, were the ever growing and lasting effects on cultural perception. One of the most significant players in the Revolution's new industries was, of course, the railroad. Indeed, the railroad, a major factor in Industrialization, not only changed the landscape latterly as it unsympathetically carved through the terrain, but also how this new and innovative transformation in transportation changed commonly held conceptions and understandings of the landscape and nature. These new perceptions of nature will serve as the focus of this research. The term revolution, as used in the context in the 19th century rise in industry, has been interpreted differently. Many view the Industrial Revolution as not being a revolution at all but more of a gradual process in which it grew out of preceding conditions and technologies. However in the case of the railroad, that is in the immediate changes in the landscape and in the people's perceptions of nature, the experience and impact of the railroad was a complete rupture with human environmental experiences before it.

¹ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey; Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 48.

The discussion of Railroads is most certainly always present with any study into the effects of the Industrial Revolution. The combination of steel and steam would prove unmatched during the time of increasing need for transportation. Undeniably, the growth of industrialization, more specifically, the growth in railroads, contributes greatly to the overall study of 19th century industrialization. Previous works, which discuss the ever-present idea in the increase in cross-cultural experiences due to railway travel, (or for that matter with any innovative technology) provide extraordinarily in depth background knowledge for the basis of what this research hopes to accomplish. And so, as a seemingly less noticed and less acknowledged topic, in terms of the spread of railroads, this research will instead narrow an examination to how the technology of the railroad reflects the transformation of human interpretations of “wilderness” and of landscape. Simply put, the goal of this research is to expand on the existing literature of this topic and specifically focus on the connection between the revolution of the railroad and the revolution of the human-nature relationship.

However, in order to do so, several secondary sources that are relevant to the overall research proved necessary and helpful. One extremely insightful reference was Wolfgang Schivelbusch’s The Railway Journey; the Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century. Schivelbusch offers a unique look into European industrialization, which of course, is a leading theme when discussing the Industrial Revolution. Schivelbusch provides a study into the cultural changes that took place because of the railroad, and how these changes were not culturally understood in terms of previous experiences. Of course, American railroads are also a defining characteristic within landscape research. Therefore, another work that was an extremely instrumental reference

as far as background information is James A. Ward's Railroads and the Character of America, 1820-1887. Because I agree with Ward that "there is a distinctive aura that envelopes the United States and its people, Americans look at the world differently, enjoy a unique historical perspective and sometimes act in ways that seem peculiar to foreign eyes"² this book seemed quite suitable as a reference in American perspectives. In fact, the perceptions that Americans gained because of the railroad reflect just that, the uniqueness of American outlook of American land in the nationality, pride, and power over nature that the railroad brought especially in its voyage to the West.

To begin, Schivelbusch's main argument throughout his book is that the detachment of man from nature and his perception of nature is decided in the "discovery of steam power" and the construction of the railroad.³ Schivelbusch devotes much of his work to tell a story through the idea that the modernization process includes not only economic development but also social changes as they are closely related with technological innovations. As Schivelbusch allows most of his research of the railroad to be in the cultural changes that took place in concepts of space and time, his main goal is to discuss the impacts on social divisions. Although he does incorporate a discussion of how train tracks were built by changing the land, that is raising, lowering, or tunneling, he does this in an end goal to show how railroads seemingly decreased the space and time between destinations. Schivelbusch offers a solid basis for my topic, being that our themes are quite similar, however what seems to be left less developed in Schivelbusch's research is first how the tunneling, raising and lowering changed the land permanently

² James A. Ward, *Railroads and the Character of America, 1820-1887*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986), 3.

³ *The Railway Journey*, 20.

and through doing so caused the environment that Europeans experience to be changed. Also as Schivelbusch describes, railroad, altered travelers' *ideas of space, time and distance* I argue that it altered travelers' experiences *with nature and the landscape* as this new industrialization denaturalized the passengers and their experiences with travel. Therefore, by using Schivelbusch's detachment theory and applying it to American westward expansions and how nature detachment plus American ideals of domination contributes to the ways people view the land. In other words, by using Schivelbusch as a basis I will be able to organize and create my about American experiences, and how these Americans perceived the West and how the railroad got them there.

James Ward's work will be compatible with my examining of American railroads and Americans' history in westward expansion. Ward gives a detailed account of the American iron horse and how this provided wealth and lands. Certainly with the expansion of the railroad comes the expansion into the West. The "West" was seen as an unknown wilderness, but because of the railroad people were able to not only experience it, but tame it. The experience with nature was now different in terms of travel due to the railroad. Before a journey would be done on a horse, maybe with a cart, which offered a very personal experience with the terrain one traveled upon. In fact, traveling, before railroads, was considered much more dangerous. Railroads now carried travelers across the landscape in an unpersonal voyage as a rider would experience the environment only through the borders of a window. Ward addresses these themes, but what this research attempts to continue upon is the idea that as Americans expanded into the West via train, the perceptions of the landscape expanded as well. The railroads allowed Americans to

experience, more quickly, conveniently, and sophisticatedly a “wilderness” that expanded past their homes.

Certainly these and the other resources used for this study will assist in accomplishing my project’s overall goals and any aspects of this research that need to be further explained, I am confident that the general secondary resources obtained on Industrialization can absolutely contribute to the study of cultural effects. Therefore, within the following research the resources compiled will be combined in order to not only further the study of what is lacking in the current literature, that is the specific study in the changes in the relationship between people and their environment, but also to bring these topics together in a geographical comparison as well. By combining this research with these more general works, and also, of course, primary sources that assist the argument, this research will contribute to the study of the Industrial Revolution, railroads, and a cultural aspect of this history that is a topic less addressed or recognized.

America was not yet the United States and while the North and the South were battling over economic priorities, land, and different and changing ideals, the American thought process began to change. Certainly, before Americans could ever dream of a traveling westward, the North and the South would have to decide the rebellion, and as American lives were in the midst of the Civil War, the idea of uniting the competing states was hopeful. Although the Civil War was no prevalent topic for her, Emily Dickinson quite often wrote of an “iron horse” that proved to be wildly influential during these war times. In 1862, Dickinson reflected the perceptions of many Americans when she wrote, “I like to see it lap the miles and lick valleys up [...]”⁴. This description Dickinson created was of both machine and speed that engulfed the American backdrop,

it was an iron horse that raced across distances, it was; the American railroad. Certainly, the railroad served as strategic resources for Civil War armies and while the railways that traveled along the east assisted the war effort, so too did their tracks help nail the nation back together. Just as these rails that traveled throughout and laid across American soil changed the literal landscape, changes in American understanding and perceptions of this newly created landscape started to surface. The North had won the Civil war and America had gone from Harriet Tubman's *Underground Railroad*, to railroads that cut and curved freely on, through and across the ground. As railroads helped bring the Civil War to an end, America was emerging into a nation united under its pride in its landscape, and these American railroads contributed to the character of this growing United States.

However, it was three year prior in 1862 that Congress passed and President Abraham Lincoln signed the *Pacific Railway Act* which was stated as “an act to aid in the construction of a railroad and telegraph line from the Missouri River to the Pacific Ocean and to secure the government the use of the same for postal, military, and other purposes”.⁵ *The Pacific Railway Act* would serve as the starting point of an American historic landmark, the Transcontinental Railroad. In the 1850s Congress had constructed several topographical surveys throughout the West to establish what would serve as the best route for a railroad that would travel to the Pacific Coast. Two railroad companies, the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific, were put in charge to construct the line.⁶

⁴ Emily Dickinson, *Manuscript of Emily Dickinson*, ed., R.W Franklin (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1981), ?

⁵ “The Pacific Railway Act”, ed., Christine Compston & Rachel Seidman, *Our Documents; 100 Milestone Documents from the National Archives*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 84.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 84.

This westward expansion in the form of Manifest Destiny was certainly an ideal that was spread further due to the Transcontinental Railroad. Moreover, the common cause found in railroad construction in order to make the west's acreage accessible to the "landless and the small farmers was a powerful and unifying force."⁷ The railroad experience was a new type of travel that could take Americans into, and bring them face to face with the western wilderness on an iron road. In fact, just like in Europe, Americans believed in progress and many Europeans like Americans believed that "humans could and should 'improve' on nature."⁸ Indeed, the American west was the mysterious wilderness that held the hopes and dreams of so many Americans. Railroad promoters, as every citizen, knew that American character and pride was seeded in the far reaching but no longer out of reach lands of the west. "Nowhere was this appeal to native optimism more evident than in the literature that touched on the possibility that railroads would unlock the treasures of the West. [...] Nothing so captured Americans' imaginations as their West. It became a metaphor for the character of America."⁹ The American Transcontinental Railroad absolutely contributed to the path to the Pacific and also became an important character in the role of the "Great West".

One of the Transcontinental Railroad's most enthused advocates was a China merchant by the name Asa Whitney. Far before the golden spike was laid on the Transcontinental Railroad in 1869, Whitney dreamed of a rail-line that would connect the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific. Whitney lived in New York and made his money through

⁷ *Railroads and the Character of America, 1820-1887*, 82.

⁸ David Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature; Water Landscape and the Making of Modern Germany* (New York: W.W Norton & Co.), ?

⁹ *Railroads and the Character of America, 1820-1887*, 94.

the China trade. The China merchant saw past the plains in the west and the Rocky Mountains and peered to the Pacific Ocean, where he envisioned a railroad that would join the two oceans that framed the U. S. In 1849, in his *Project for a Railroad to the Pacific*, Whitney pleads, “Will you, then, allow me to take these wilderness waste lands, as they are now, without timber, without navigable streams, without value, and impossible of settlement and build this great highway for nations, and from the facilities which it would afford, settle the lands with a population which would be a source of wealth and power to the nation [...]”¹⁰ Whitney had dreamed of a connecting railroad, and presented his aspirations to congress to try and pass his idea that would connect the eastern railway systems with western lands. Congress seemed of little interest to Whitney’s big dream. Perhaps he was ahead of his time, and so, it would not be until two decades later that Abraham Lincoln would sign *The Pacific Railway Act* and two decades later that Asa Whitney’s goals and plans would be realized.

It is, of course, necessary to consider how the construction of this railroad acted as the pathway into the west and therefore, the pathway, as many Americans saw it, into opportunity. However, what is equally if not more important is the examination into people’s perceptions of the American landscape and how these perceptions were triggered by the use of railroads. What is more, the railroad system allowed for new ways to interpret the land. Whitney, in his *Project for a Railway to the Pacific* paper, did not seem particularly sympathetic towards the western lands. He reflects the overall American vision of the “wild west” as he sees the land only as elements of economy,

¹⁰ Asa Whitney *A Project for a Railroad to the Pacific*, (New York: George W. Wood, 1849), 3.

industry and income. Whitney uses powerful language in his paper in attempt to convince his readers for the need of an east-west line. When he writes the words “wilderness” and “wasteland” he echoes the thoughts of many in the obvious lack of connectedness to the American landscape. Perhaps the most prevalent of Whitney’s attempts at convincing of the importance in salvaging the western wilderness is in the preface to his paper. Whitney writes, “For yourselves, for your children, for your country, for the destitute over population of Europe, without food and without homes—for the heathen, the barbarian and the savage, on whom the blessings and lights of civilization and Christianity have never shone—for the Chinese, who, for want of food must destroy their offspring [...]”¹¹

Whitney does not leave any chance at exaggeration out of his paper. He first grabs the readers’ attention by stressing that railroads west are what is good for “yourself and your children.” According to Whitney, America will soon be like Europe with no food and no room for any of its citizens. He brings in, not surprisingly because he is a Chinese trader, the tragedy of the Chinese who don’t have the economy or the land to support over-sized families. But America, Whitney is sure, is blessed with plenty of space, space that is considered wasteland and holds no other good use. Whitney imagines the land for the landless that could farm new and unfortold fortunes. Moreover, Whitney’s reference to the heathens, the barbarians, and the savages is how European Americans viewed the Native Americans. In fact, the Indians that had existed on American lands centuries before were seen as simply another aspect of the wilderness that was the west. Whitney and other Americans believed it was their civilizing duty to save the Indians from their

¹¹ *Project for a Railroad to the Pacific*, preface.

barbaric ways and shed the light of Christianity (and proper civilization) upon them. What easier way to reach the Native Americans and other areas of the west than through the railroad? Now, not only did Americans view the west as being their innate responsibility and property, the unifying characteristics in traveling west to “save” the Indians and to civilize the “wasteland” are undeniable. Certainly as land and distance became more accessible to people through railroad travel, the experience on the railroad would serve as a desensitizing force that eliminated connections and a relationship between Americans and American land.

Indeed, American railroads stretched throughout much of America and into the west in what seemed like no time. In the beginning, what seemed like a seed planted in the soil on which the few railways existed, grew a magnificent creation with branches that reached as far west as a person could travel. With immigrant workers of nearly 8,000 Irish, German and Italian along with Chinese laborers as well, Asa Whitney’s dream, the Transcontinental Railroad was completed, cross country, in just six years.¹² Railroad progress in this industrialized time was undeniable. Maps that depicted railroad lines across America began to become increasingly crowded.¹³ Railways between the 1830s and the 1840s saw over 2,800 miles of American land, although strictly kept in the east.¹⁴ By the 1850s railroads had begun to expand westward as far as Mississippi. 9,021 miles of train tracks were laid down by 1850 and were continually mounting.¹⁵ Within another

¹² *Our Documents*, 84

¹³ John F. Stover, *The Routledge Historical Atlas of the American Railroads*, (New York: Routledge, 1999), 15, 17, 21

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 15

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 17

ten years, Ohio, Illinois, New York, Pennsylvania, and Indiana were proud states leading the nation's railroad mileage count. By 1860 there was a 30,000-mile iron network that "could be divided into nearly equal thirds: 10,000 miles in the eleven-state Northeast; 11,000 in the old Northwest-Midwest; and over 9,000 miles in the South."¹⁶ The growth of these railroad branches did not stop with the end of the Civil War; the years between 1880 and 1890 saw the most rapid expansive railroad growth in all of American history. "In that ten-year period, 7,030 miles of railroad a year were added."¹⁷ This amazing and unparalleled development totaled in 70,300 miles of train track laid over the country in a single decade.¹⁸

Without a doubt, the railway lines that were drawn across much of America, contributed to Americans changing perceptions and conceptualizations in how they understood the land. In 1843 one traveler writes "Dreamlike traveling on the railroad. The town which I pass between Philadelphia and New York make no distinct impression. They are like pictures on a wall. The more, that you can read all the way in a car a French novel."¹⁹ Now railroads allowed for a scenic type travel. It is interesting to describe traveling as dreamlike because just a few years earlier travel would require a horse and carriage. To travel cross country into the west was a dangerous task because the threat of what the wilderness would reveal was often life threatening. Traveling before the railroad incorporated a firsthand account with the environment in that every aspect of the

¹⁶ Ibid., 21.

¹⁷ ed., Poyntz Tyler *Outlook for the Railroads, The Reference Shelf Vol32. No. Library of Congress*, (New York: H.W Wilson Co. 1960), 15.

¹⁸ Ibid., 15,

¹⁹ *The Railway Journey*, 52.

landscape was experienced and *no* portion of a journey would seem *not* to leave a distinct impression. Now travel with the use of the railroads changed the relationship between traveler and environment as people experience the American wilderness through a train window. The landscape had become a panoramic photograph that was viewed and adored instead of experienced.

Just as in America, Europe's cultural frame-work was changed by the increase in railroad travel. Throughout Europe, the railroad was the source of new cultural impacts and changes that occurred during the Industrial Revolution period. New and ever-changing railway journeys were the result of the European Industrialization. Like previously stated, European societies and cultures, like the manufactured products, were in fact revolutionized by the railroad. Europe was already a continent of establishment unlike the U.S which had a century ago, fought for its Independence, and decades ago, fought its own Civil War. Europe was culturally more developed and intellectually more ready for development. Again, unlike America, the railroad did not serve as a unifying force that would be instrumental in land domination and development. Europe was plenty developed at this point. The idea of the American western wilderness was not what made up Europeans' perceptions of their environment. Europeans, for example in Germany, were already traveling from city to city. The travel was through animal power and when the railroad came about it did not serve as a passage into an unknown land like in America. Instead it was seen as a way to destroy time and minimize space and distance.²⁰

In other words, because of railway travel, Europeans could experience travel in a

²⁰ *The Railway Journey*, 20.

different way. Transferring to rail-car travel caused the European experience to form a shift from a culture having a natural or organic quality (being that before steam and steel the main resources were water and stone; animal and man) to an unnatural or inorganic quality. In fact, as “wood lost its universal function” it allowed for “emancipation from the boundaries of natural products”.²¹ European railroads showed a detachment of man from nature and his perception of nature was decided in the discovery of steam power.

Certainly the construction of the European railroad allowed for a cross cultural blend within the boundaries of Europe that made countries and cities alike more accessible to each other’s good and technologies. This access to new people includes the much easier ability to reach different towns which in turn means the access to different cultures. Before the transformation in transportation, “goods remained part of the local identity of their place of production.”²² With the expansion of the railroad, certain towns no longer held the special qualities that described their region. Goods that helped define culture could now be spread, or reached with the railroad. With this new transportation, various goods became “uprooted commodities” and people no longer had to travel long and rugged distances to reach commodities that weren’t native to their region. They simply boarded a train.²³ Therefore in examining America and Europe’s differing experiences with the railroad a comparative element can be drawn. American railroads used by Americans to explore a new and unseen land that provided so much of the American landscape. The American West and the cultural interpretations of its nature and environment was shaped by the railroad. In Europe railroad contributed to a quicker

²¹ *The Railway Journey*, 2.

²² *Ibid.*, 40.

²³ *Ibid.*, 40.

access to different places which in turn created a cultural trade that might not have otherwise been possible. Therefore the difference lies in the fact that Americans and their relationship with the railroad shaped their relationship with the landscape. Europeans relationship with the railroad, on the other hand, was the outcome of environmental changes due to the ability to access new products.

Like the Native American discussed before, who was seen as a part of the American west's environment, so too did the American railroad become accepted as a part of the landscape. As it traveled through hills and mountains, over rivers, and curved with the land, the American railroad has continually been quite romantically depicted in artwork of the 19th century as a discrete part of the landscape. Certainly as the railroad's popularity grew, Americans began to perceive their environment differently and the railroad would forever be a part of American history and its history in the pride and character throughout the 19th century.

Four years ago, I entered into college with the knowledge that I liked and appreciated history and four years of history classes at Shippensburg University later have certainly demonstrated the process of acquiring the skills and the knowledge that I have gained in my ongoing and continual development as a historian. To write this assessment of my progress throughout the Shippensburg History B.A program is not without a bitter-sweet sense of accomplishment, mostly because I am overwhelmingly proud of the work that I have done that is required to achieve success within the history department's curriculum. I have experienced the growth of my abilities as a history major and have personally witnessed the differences that have come from year to year in my historical practice. Certain skills like writing papers, analytical and in depth research, locating resources, understanding and interpreting primary documents, citing sources, understanding lengthy and scholarly readings and so many others are all types of knowledge that have certainly been a learned process.

The beginning of my progress as a historian began with the required world history classes, and certainly, as I advanced through into upper-level classes, the comparative aspects that came with learning of world history were essential in understanding all types of specific area histories. Of course, Jerry Bentley's "Why Study World History?" reflects upon the utmost importance of studying world history. Bentley provides three main reasons of why historians should study world history which include it as a "form of historical knowledge", it "prepares students for responsible citizenship," and as Bentley states, world history contributes to good "judgment and wisdom."¹ Certainly these three necessities that Bentley claims are themes within the skills and knowledge I have obtained through my works as a history major.

¹ Jerry Bentley, "Why Study World History?" *World History Connected*, (University of Illinois, 2007), 1,3,5

My Theory and Practice class, instructed by professor Robert Shaffer, required that I write a paper on the specific themes discussed throughout the course. Because the Great Depression was a significant aspect of Dr. Shaffer's class I chose to base my research on women's working roles during the depression. My main argument centered around my findings that while jobs for men decreased significantly during the 1930s, numbers of working women actually went up. What I hoped to achieve as my thesis was that while the "working woman" increased in number "there was a significant change in the characteristics of women workers, leading to social discontent against women in the labor force."² Of course the examination of New Deal policies along with the role of First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt were intricate aspects of my Theory and Practice research. By demonstrating that not only did women take positive steps within the job market while facing doubt and inequality, but while doing so began a type of feminist movement, my paper contributed a different dimension in the discussion of women and the Great Depression.³ This paper served as one of the first, in depth and demanding research papers I would be assigned throughout my four years. Dr. Shaffer's class called for constant analytical thinking which was the main struggle, as a sophomore, I faced while composing my working-women paper. Reflecting back on writing this paper in November of 2007, I recall focusing extensively on primary resource research, locating and therefore interpreting my findings, and properly citing my material. These skills seem to be the basic necessary knowledge for all historians to master and therefore by learning how to do the steps that are required in all

² Hannah Taylor, "Working Women and the Great Depression", 2007, 3

³ Ibid., 3

historic research I was able to implement these practices into my future classes. I acquired much knowledge on where to look for primary and secondary sources, in terms of what type of search engines to use for articles, and what kind of scholarly journals to use in order to find primary sources. I learned the proper way to cite different kind of documents in Theory and Practice along with interpreting my primary sources, which consisted most of journals and letters. The Ezra Leman Library and the library website served as the main necessities that I would need in researching my topic, mainly because search tools found on the library web-site provided a number of primary source documents on Roosevelt's New Deal and the Great Depression. Although Theory and Practice would teach me the basic skills that would be needed to apply in my following history classes, my environmental history class would provide an experience with historical research that, until that point, I had not yet encountered.

Again, this history elective class was based around out of class reading assignments, and one final research paper. The class was structured this way so that the students could spend the necessary time researching and developing their thesis. From this course I learned the step by step process of developing a theme for an overall project. Determining my thesis statement was a process in of itself that would contribute greatly to the success of my paper. I learned of the importance in finding a topic that is within my interests because, as I found from this project, the amount of hard work and hours put into a research paper is extremely rewarding when you have chosen a topic that is conforms to your interests. My project was on Yosemite National Park and the relationship it had with American soldiers, which I found to be of great interest to me. My thesis statement was that the U.S military was put in charge of managing the land within Yosemite and were praised for their "friendly environmental management practices."⁴

⁴ Hannah Taylor, "Yosemite's Unlikely Environmentalists"2007, 3

Furthermore I aimed at exploring the relationship between Yosemite and the U.S Army as Yosemite was “extremely instrumental in providing the military a reason for existence giving the [army] something to protect.”⁵ This project was something that I became increasingly proud of because not only did I truly feel that I was contributing new and insightful information in the field of environmental historic studies, I also spent many hours in archival research, which was, at that point, a first time experience. Having the Army Heritage Center just down route 81 proved to be an extremely valuable resource during my research. I learned how to attempt archival research, and I also learned, from many visits to the Heritage Center, that one does not always find exactly what they need with just one or two visits. However, after several visits, and with friendly staff help my research project came together into a paper that I was extremely proud of as a sophomore in college. As this was my first time experience with such in-depth and lengthy research I felt overwhelmed and unsure in the beginning, however by the time I turned my paper in, I felt that I had gained the knowledge and the skills I would need to write any further demanding research papers that were inevitably in my future as a history major at Shippensburg.

The final and one of the most demanding works I accomplished during my four years was the assignment for the Senior Seminar Capstone class. Coming into this class I felt that I had gained the necessary abilities and know-how in order to achieve success in this class. However, I would find, after just about one week in the class that this would become the most demanding

⁵ “Yosemite’s Unlikely Environmentalists” 4

and time consuming class I had taken, which Dr. Dietrich-Ward had warned from the beginning. For this class, a final seminar paper would be due, that would need to not only implement a theme of environmental history, but also a global comparative aspect as well. The topic I selected for this research was the American railroad system and my thesis would be how the introduction and spread of the railroad changed American perspectives and relationships with the natural environment. Again archival research would be a significant aspect to my project, but this time I examined Art Museum collections in order to interpret human perceptions. I also came across several primary source documents that contributed greatly to my overall research. With this project we were required to combine a historiographical essay with a specific case study having to do with our research topic. I had never done a historiographical essay before this point, or so I thought. Reviewing back into my past papers, each began with a brief overview of what sources I used. However, this historiographical essay was more in-depth than any I had done before and had to be linked with the case study I did. Therefore, from this project I learned not only how to do a historiography I learned the importance of doing one. By adding a historiography to my research I not only discussed the sources I used in order to conduct my research, I also could discuss, then, how my research was different and would contribute something new to the study.

From these four years at Shippensburg University, I have certainly gained the knowledge, learned the tools, and received the skills necessary to continue my development as a historian. I have spent countless hours researching topics and writing papers, and one skill that I have gained, yet cannot pinpoint from where is a new writing style that is important as a historic writer. Rhetoric and eloquent sentences are very important when trying to interest a reader on

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Final Assessment Paper

any type of topic. The skills I have learned and the knowledge I have come to know from my four years in the history department will serve me well in my future.