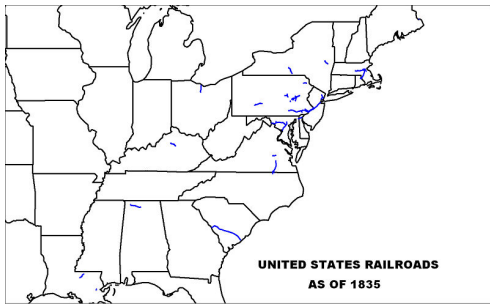


The Transcontinental Railroads

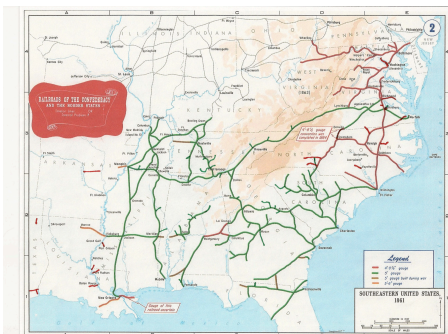
Joining track in Promontory, UT 1869



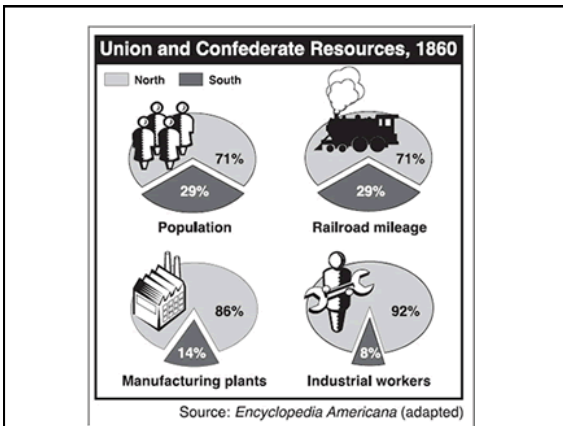
The RR in 1835



Confederate RR





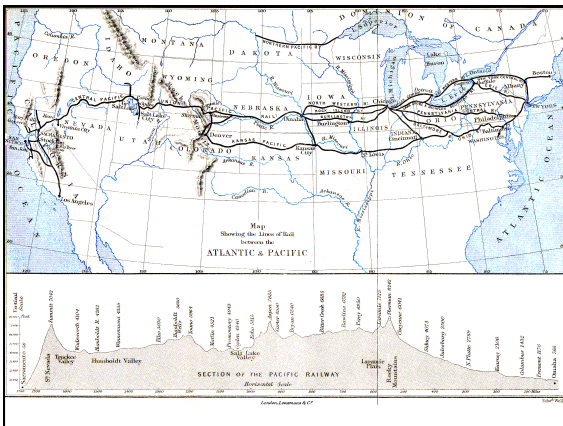


Pacific Railway Act (1862)

The question of "internal improvements" was constantly before Congress in the 19th century: Should Congress assist in improving the country's transportation system? One such improvement was the dream of constructing a railroad that would cross the entire country. In the 1850s Congress commissioned several topographical surveys across the West to determine the best route for a railroad, but private corporations were reluctant to undertake the task without Federal assistance. **In 1862 Congress passed the Pacific Railway Act, which designated the 32nd parallel as the initial transcontinental route and gave huge grants of lands for rights-of-way. The act was an effort to aid in the construction of a railroad and telegraph line from the Missouri River to the Pacific Ocean and to secure the use of that line to the government.** The legislation authorized two railroad companies, the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific, to construct the lines. Beginning in 1863, the Union Pacific, employing more than 8,000 Irish, German, and Italian immigrants, built west from Omaha, NE; the Central Pacific, whose workforce included over 10,000 Chinese laborers, built eastward from Sacramento, CA. Each company faced unprecedented construction problems—mountains, severe weather, and the hostility of Native Americans. **On May 10, 1869, in a ceremony at Promontory, UT, the last rails were laid and the last spike driven.** Congress eventually authorized four transcontinental railroads and granted 174 million acres of public lands for rights-of-way.

For more information, visit The National Archives' Treasures of Congress Online Exhibit.
 Page URL: <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=32>



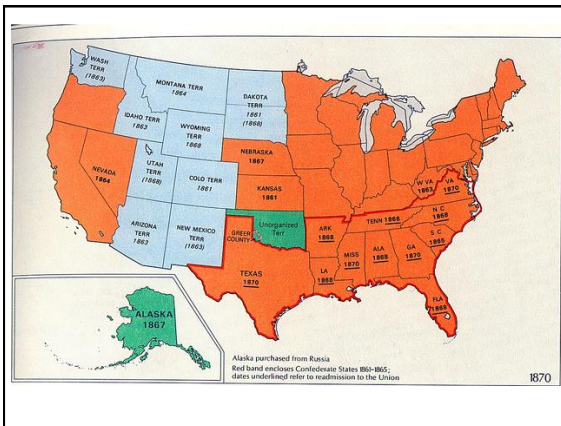


• The London banker would no longer pocket the commissions and the exchange on the immense trade carried on between New York and China...

• Harper's Weekly, July 27, 1867 (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/primary-resources/tcr-reports/>)

- New York would become, to America at least, what London is not to the rest of the world, namely, the place on which exchange is universally drawn. Millions of dollars would thereby be saved to our merchants annually, to say nothing of the difference of time, which is as precious as money.

• Harper's Weekly, July 27, 1867 (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/primary-resources/tcr-reports/>)



- We have heretofore spoken of the advantages to be obtained by the operation of the Pacific Railroad and the easy access it afford to Asiatic trade. The gains, to be sure, are for the present purely speculative, but it is easy to conjecture the results from past experience.

• Harper's Weekly, July 27, 1867 (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/primary-resources/tcr-reports/>)

