

MÉMOIRE DE MASTER
UNIVERSITÉ DE PAU ET PAYS DE L'ADOUR

Département Anglais

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**THE REPRESENTATION & PERCEPTION OF THE AMERICAN
RAILROAD: FROM ITS HEYDAY TO ITS DECLINE
WHAT REFLECTIONS DOES IT RAISE ON CURRENT TRANSPORT
PATTERNS ACROSS THE GLOBE?**



Année universitaire 2023-2024

Mémoire de master 2

Spécialité : MEEF Anglais Second degré

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Remerciements

Ce mémoire marquant la fin de ce cycle universitaire, il ne peut réellement prendre fin sans que je prenne le temps de remercier celles et ceux qui l'ont rendu possible.

Concernant le mémoire en lui-même, je tiens en premier lieu à en remercier la directrice, Mme. Roussillon-Constanty, qui dès les prémices de celui-ci, m'a vivement encouragée à poursuivre ce thème qui avait, aux premiers abords, faible lien avec la didactique. Ce sont ses conseils et son encadrement qui ont permis la création de ce mémoire dont j'ai pris grand plaisir à construire.

Ensuite, je tenais à remercier les personnes qui ont été d'une grande importance lors de mes années d'études.

C'est ainsi que je commence par remercier ma famille, sans qui le soutien n'aurait permis que j'en arrive jusqu'ici et qui n'ont cessé de croire en moi, et ce même durant les grands moments de flou.

Bien sûr, je ne peux écrire ces remerciements sans y inclure mes amis, qui je veux remercier pour tous les moments inoubliables que nous avons passés au cours de ces années et qui m'ont donné la force de continuer. Je vous remercie pour tout ce que nous avons pu partager et découvrir ensemble, ces années resteront gravées.

Un mot également pour ma promotion de master, dont les profils variés et la richesse m'ont tellement appris, alors merci à vous pour ces deux belles années dont la chaleureuse ambiance dont vous êtes à l'origine a rendu ces étapes plus légères.

Il est maintenant temps que je passe aux personnes sans qui l'anglais n'aurait jamais été une vocation. Je tiens à remercier tous les professeurs et professeures d'anglais que j'ai pu avoir au cours de ma scolarité, pas un ayant manqué à sa mission. Vous n'avez seulement pas enseigné l'anglais, mais permis l'épanouissement de nombreux individus sur le long terme.

C'est ainsi que j'en profite pour remercier Mme. Tempel, mon ancienne professeure d'anglais et tutrice de stage qui a accepté de nous accueillir, ma camarade et moi, dans ses classes. Nous n'aurions pu espérer meilleure expérience, tant sa bienveillance et ses conseils sont d'une grande richesse humaine.

Il est aussi l'occasion de remercier mon ancien lycée, le lycée Gaston Fébus à Orthez et dans lequel je suis en stage cette année, dont je garde un excellent souvenir de mes années lycéennes et en remercie la formidable équipe pédagogique qui a fait devenir qui je suis aujourd'hui.

Enfin, « last but far from least », ces derniers remerciements vont à Mr. Schatz, mon ancien professeur d'anglais de Première qui m'a donné une tout autre vision de l'éducation, à qui je

dois beaucoup et ne remercierai jamais assez pour la bienveillance et la patience dont il a fait preuve durant mes années lycée jusqu'à aujourd'hui. Ce mot est infiniment faible par rapport à la réalité, mais, merci.

SECTION 1

THE EVOLUTION OF THE REPRESENTATION & PERCEPTION OF THE AMERICAN RAILROAD: FROM ITS HEYDAY TO ITS DECLINE



Introduction

The railroad, which so greatly contributed to the shaping of the American identity through westward expansion and was once a symbol of industrial progress, has by now almost fallen into oblivion in its own country. What were the causes of its decline and could we trace them throughout its history is what inspired me to write this essay. In the context of global warming and climate change, governments across the globe have seen in the railroad a potential answer to the prevention of transport pollution, thus orienting their politics towards revalorisation plans of passenger rail and freight services. This shift towards more environment-friendly transport policies may lead to question the relationship civilisations have had towards transports across history. Through this approach, this essay will focus on the phenomenon of the railroad across American history from its beginnings to its heyday until its decline. To analyse the evolution of the railroad in America, the point will be to study the history of its symbolism in American culture, either in terms of passenger rail or freight services. For this, the concepts of *representation* and *perception* in a cultural context will have to be borne in mind. By resorting to the notion of *representation*, what is meant is the diversity of modes and devices to depict an element in written, visual, or spoken language. Thus, representations may either aim at depicting an item realistically or at reflecting its essence more conceptually. The choices behind a particular type of representation may be triggered by personal or – as it will be dealt with in this essay – cultural and political motives. Understanding the social influence systems of representation may hold over the population will be key to this essay. For this reason, the history of visual American railroad advertising will be studied. However, if the study of representation may lead to undeniable social effects, a gap between the responder and the creator of a given representation may exist. Therefore, preventing the creator from affecting the responder as intended. Such a phenomenon will be tackled through the concept of *perception*, at the heart of which lies the American population itself. By “perception”, what is meant is the different ways of conceiving an element, the basic step in the formation of a concept and how one’s behaviour may change through the creation of this concept. The perception the American population has of railroad advertisements.

The intent of this essay will also be to define how the representation and perception of the American railroad evolved from its heyday – from the 1870s to the 1900s – to its decline – from the 1910s to the 1960s – thus almost covering a whole century of American history.

To do so, the unexpected and exceptional nature of the creation of the Transcontinental Railroad will be dealt with first. Secondly, the characteristics which marked the “Golden Age” for American railroading will be defined. Finally, following what may be termed the Golden Age, an era of hardships defined by World Wars and economic competitiveness among the transport industry will be studied.

I. Challenging all expectations: the building of the Transcontinental Railroad

To showcase the evolution of the representation of the railroad in American history, the first point we will have to demonstrate is the reasons behind such prosperity. That is to understand what made the achievement of the Transcontinental Railroad on May 10th, 1869 exceptional. This part will cover the transport revolution this line led to, from its completion in 1869 until the late 1870s, the period preceding the “Golden Age” of the American railroad.

As an introduction to the period, attention must be paid to the following quote from the American historian Robert E. Riegel, which encapsulates the general atmosphere at the time:

The war was over, prosperity was returning, and the completion of the joint Union-Pacific-Central Pacific project seemed a wonderful consummation of the hopes of years. The country looked forward to an unexcelled period of prosperity under the beneficent influence of the steam locomotive.

Riegel, Robert E. *The Story of the Western Railroads: From 1852 through the Reign of the Giants*. Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1964. Ch. VI, p. 91

a. The Arrival of the “Iron Horse”: Drastically revolutionising the mode of travelling

Considered as one of the milestones of American history, the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad was officially agreed on July 1st, 1862 through the Pacific Railway Act passed by Congress and President Abraham Lincoln. This legislation stated that the project of unifying the West and the East was to be done by two companies: the Union Pacific Railroad Company was charged of building westward from the Missouri River, and the Central Pacific Railroad of building eastward from Sacramento, California. To increase the speed at which the line was constructed, both companies were to receive part of public lands and government loan for each mile of track laid. The junction of the Eastern and Western lines finally took place on May 10th, 1869 at Promontory Summit, Utah. The Transcontinental Railroad was now completed. To celebrate the event, the two tracks were joined by a golden spike. Nowadays, the golden spike remains an important symbol in American history.

The consequences of the development of the transcontinental railroad were numerous. Among the major consequences the establishment of the Transcontinental Railroad was the massive transport revolution it led to. By transport revolution, what is meant is “*a period in the U.S. when transportation became cheaper and more efficient with the rapid development of new technology*”¹ (Smithsonian American Art Museum, 2016). Before the widespread use of the railroad, the two main ways of travelling were by horse and by boat.

Travelling in horse-drawn carriages initiated exhausting, long journeys with no fixed end. For instance, a travel that was meant to last a couple weeks could eventually last several months. Travellers also had to face harsh terrain, crossing mountains, canyons, and sinuous roads while adapting to the changing weather. Such harsh conditions could lead the weakest to die before reaching their destination.

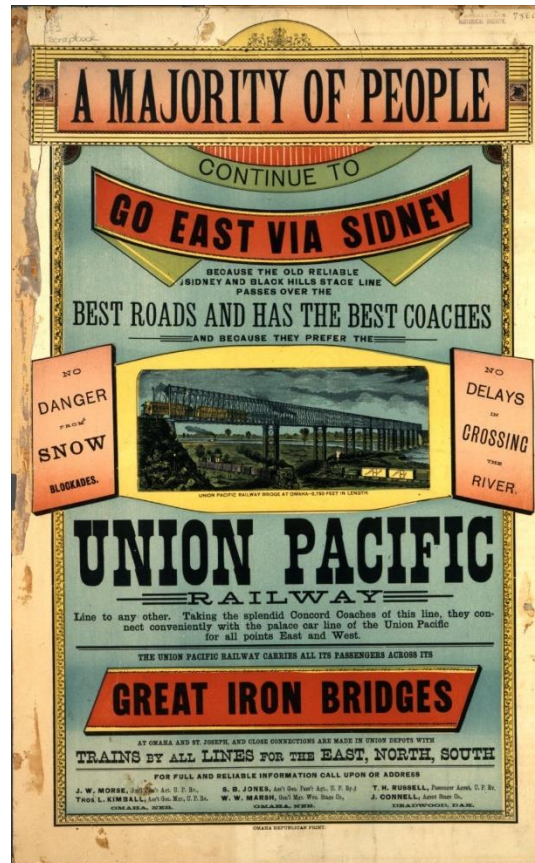
If steamboats stood as a better alternative to horse travelling due to their rapidity and capacity of transporting merchandise, they remained highly dangerous. This was due to the explosion of boilers when too much pressure was produced, or to the presence of debris in the rivers, which led boats to sink. Steamboats also had to adapt to harsh climate conditions which sometimes prevented navigation.

In such a context, American historian John F. Stover notes “some new form of transportation, year-round in regularity, safe and cheap, overland and unlimited in route, was obviously needed”². The transport revolution the transcontinental railroad represented was indeed an

¹ <https://americanexperience.si.edu/>; consulted on November 24th, 2023

² Stover, John F. *American Railroads*. Univ. of Chicago Press, 1961, Ch. I, p. 10

answer to the issue. A phenomenon which railroad companies would use as a selling point in their advertisements in the 1870s, as reflected by the following poster from *Union Pacific Railway*:



A majority of people continue to go east via Sidney on the Union Pacific Railway (1870-1890), poster, Union Pacific Railroad

The idea of breaking ties with older means of transport was indeed used as an argument to attract new passengers. Precisely, the advertising technique used here consists in using the flaws of the steamboat and comparing them to the assets of the railroad.

The train is promoted as an all-weather means of transport, competing with the often-restricted navigation of the steamboat mentioned earlier on and visually illustrated in the poster by the two red rectangles on each side of the main caption. One of them reads: “No *DANGER* from *SNOW BLOCADES*”, when the other further says: “No *DELAYS* in *CROSSING* the *RIVER*.” Here, two visual advertising techniques must be noted: the red-coloured background is used to attract the viewer’s attention and the use of capital letters that highlights the key terms. Such aesthetic choices can be explained by the fact railroads started borrowing promotional techniques from American political campaigns.

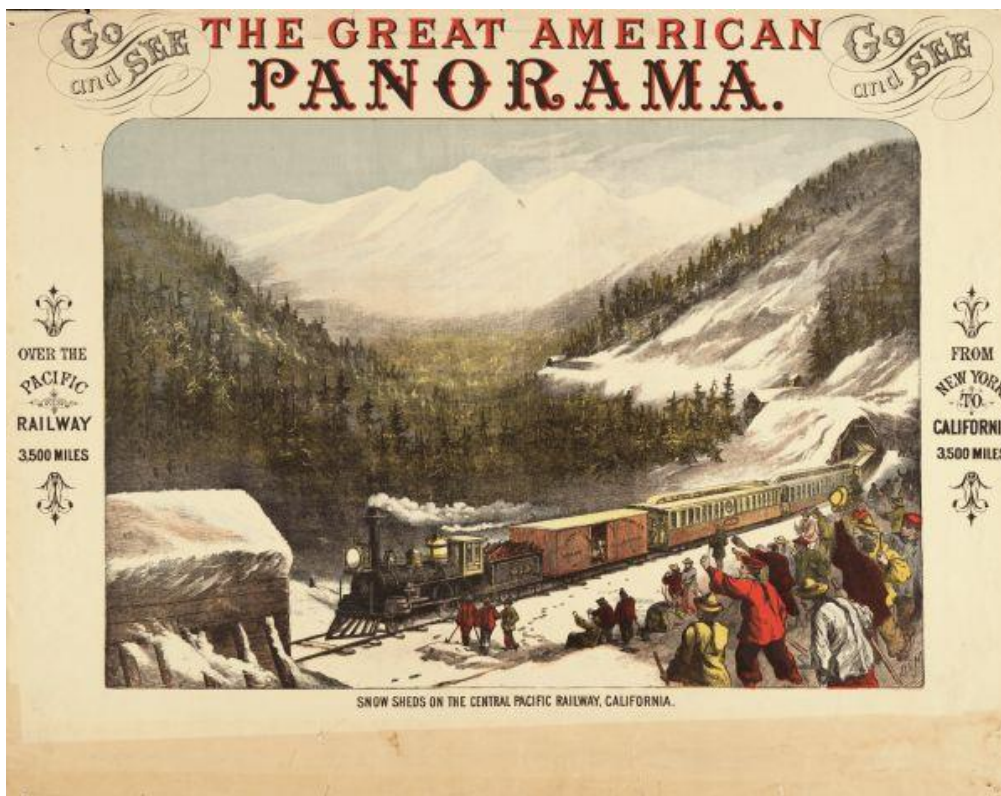
Along the same lines, the emphasis is also put on the great infrastructures which were built for it to operate: “*No DELAYS in CROSSING the RIVER*”. In this case, the symbolic reference to the bridge is effective, as it testifies to the industrial progress brought about by the railroad. Rail bridges overcame the obstacles canals stood as and proved humanity was capable of challenging natural frontiers. Their power is highlighted by the deep red background of the “*GREAT IRON BRIDGES*” sign, which is itself written in bold capital letters. The new, massive infrastructures bridges represented at the time is central to the poster. As if framed by the two pictures warning against previous means of transportation, a detailed print of the train occupies centre stage. All in all, the poster offers a rather idealistic, picturesque depiction of the American landscape and the modernity of the railroad. If the main point was to promote mass passenger services (as shown by the use of the words “*A MAJORITY OF PEOPLE*” and “*COACHES*”), freight locomotives were also presented as to complete the landscape too.

Here again, the railroad indeed provided a better mode of transportation and started replacing steamboats. Despite the brief competition which arose between railroads and canals, the advantages of the railroad put a definite end to water transportation. The railroad was faster, connected remote towns to large national and international markets, and proved more dependable as rail bridges prevented them from being impacted by winter ice unlike steamboats. Witnessing such success and potential, entrepreneurs greatly invested in the “Iron Horse”, which was now to spread across the nation. Travelers also started considering the railroad as a serious option for their journeys, as its assets were now greatly acknowledged.

However, if the railroad represented a massive transport revolution by overcoming natural obstacles, improvement of this new kind of mobility was not an easy task to achieve.

b. The American panorama: a burden turned asset

As briefly mentioned earlier, the railroad demonstrated major progress in civil engineering. Yet, before railroad companies used the regularity and fluidity of their lines as a selling point, building a transcontinental railroad meant launching a long, challenging construction project. The line was indeed built in six years, a job that was nearly completed by hand as workers faced extreme weather conditions and laid tracks across mountains, canyons, deserts and rivers. In particular, building mountain tunnels proved arduous, slow process and the Central Pacific Railroad was the most exposed to it. Specifically, while the Union Pacific Railroad mainly encountered flat terrain in the East, in the West, the Central Pacific had to lay track through the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California. Such an achievement is illustrated by the following poster by the Central Pacific company:



The Great American Panorama (1869), poster, Union Pacific Railroad

As mentioned by the title in capital letters “*THE GREAT AMERICAN PANORAMA*” at the top of the poster, American landscapes and geographical characteristics are associated with the idea of a “panorama”. In the history of visual arts, panoramas were “large circular painting that aimed to give the viewer the experience of being physically present in the scene depicted, whether that was a landscape, a city, a battle or other historical event. Panoramas served as mass entertainment, popular and propaganda” and were extremely popular in the late nineteenth and

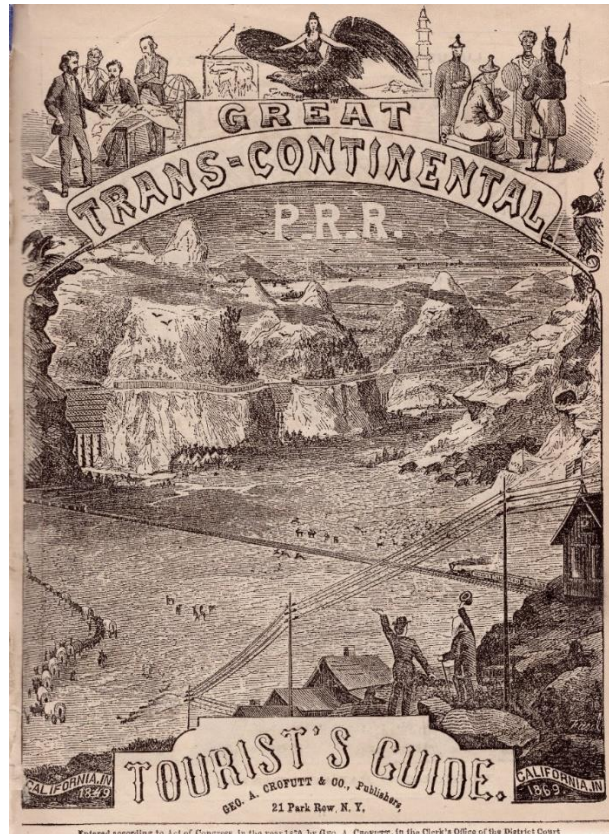
early nineteenth centuries.³ From this definition, the harsh terrain the Sierra Nevada Mountains represented for the railroad crews and the company seems to have been turned into a touristic argument.

As in the previous poster, what is presented here is a picturesque representation of the mountains of California, but in this case, the reference is to painted panoramas. The vast nature of the mountains and forests is represented here. They occupy the largest part of the scene and seem to be cut through by a black locomotive. This type of scene was greatly exceptional at the time and railroad advertising played with the shaping of new landscapes the transcontinental railroad led to. The goal was to attract new passengers as well as tourists, as underlined by the “*GO AND SEE*” catchphrases framing the word “panorama”.

What also must be noted is the presence of Chinese workers in the bottom right corner of the advert. Their warm-coloured clothes clash with the cold tones of the snow-covered mountains. The way they are standing and waving at the locomotive seems to indicate their delight at its sight. Despite the scene being idealised, their high contribution to the building of the transcontinental railroad is acknowledged. If the line was accomplished through the labour of Irish and German immigrants, former Union and Confederate soldiers, Chinese immigrants represented the most significant part of the workforce. In the context of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, they were the ones who dug tunnels across the mountains by hand drilling holes and filling black powder in them. Due to the dangerous work it represented, the negative temperatures and avalanches, hundreds of them died. Despite their contribution being mentioned in history books, society did not acknowledge it. This probably due to the presence of anti-Asian racism in the 19th century in the U.S.

If discovering American landscapes was used as an advertising technique to promote the transcontinental railroad in the West, similar were the techniques in the East.

³ (<https://shannonsel.com/2016/11/panoramas-19th-century/>, last accessed on December 19th, 2023)



Great Trans-Continental P.R.R. Tourist's Guide (1870), poster, Pennsylvania Railroad

As shown by this advert created by the Pennsylvania Railroad, Californian mountains were also used as a selling point by eastern promoters. The same advertising techniques used in the Union Pacific poster can be found here: a panorama-like advert, references to touristic activities. Chinese workers were also represented.

However, what makes the specificity of it is the addition of an American symbol at the top of the picture: the emblematic bald eagle, embodying such values as strength, courage, and freedom.

Another striking element is the presence of the “Big Four” in the top left corner i.e., the founders of the transcontinental railroad: Leland Stanford, Collis Potter Huntington, Mark Hopkins Jr. and Charles Crocker. As they are represented using maps and earth globes, they are consequently associated with pioneer figures, pioneerism being a key notion in American history.

The railroad was therefore associated with exploring the “American panorama”: breath-taking, exceptional landscapes which the public could now access.

c. A call for the West... triggering growing scepticism among the population?

Through railroad advertising, Americans were incited to discover landscapes they had never seen before. However, if the railroad promoted touristic activities, investors also saw in it an opportunity to develop human and economic activity in the West. That is, to encourage the eastern population to settle in western lands. To achieve such a goal, promoters had to create an attractive vision of “The West” which would bring in new settlers, the representation of which that will be studied in this part. The American historian and rail curator William L. Withuhn characterises this phenomenon as follows:

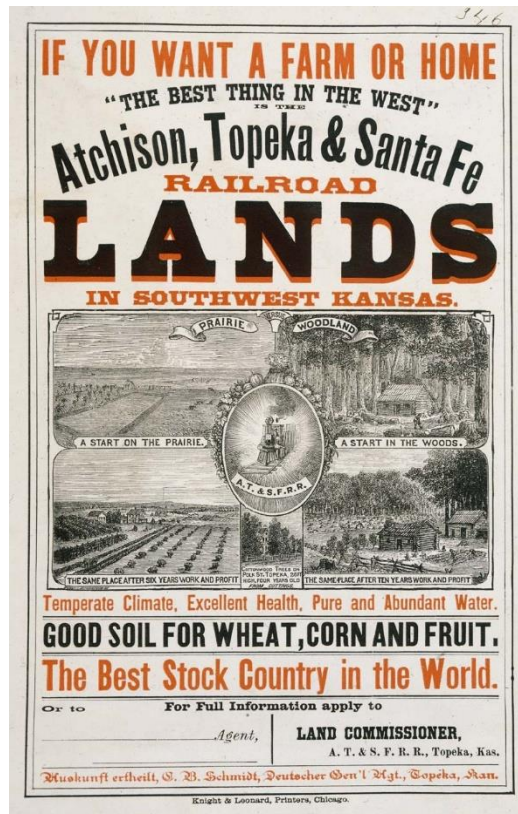
Perhaps the deepest and long-lasting consequence of connecting the east and west by rail was the creation of the concept we call today “The West”. The railroads transformed the notion of vast, unknown lands into the psychological image of the West, a wonderful place which ordinary people could visit, understand, desire, and romanticize.

Withuhn, William L. *Rails across America: A History of Railroads in North America*. Smithmark Publishers, 1993. p. 46

Their plan, indeed, turned out to be successful. In the 1870s and 1880s, the transcontinental railroad brought millions of Americans into the western territory and surpassed the “Frontier”⁴ line. The goal of transforming the West was even reflected in railroad official corporate names. By 1880, many of them had included the word “Pacific” or “Western”.

This mass settlement was due to a “rebranding” of the West. For it to be attractive, the population needed to be given strong arguments to leave behind their past-life in the East. The main argument was the promise of better living conditions in the West, an opportunity for immigrants to start a new life, and this by running a farm. Precisely, over the period, the West was mainly promoted for its agricultural potential. The following poster from the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad company is an example of such “branding”:

⁴ The “Frontier” as defined by European settlers: the line between “civilised” and “uncivilised” lands.



If You Want A Farm Or Home (1870s), poster for lands in southwest, Kansas
Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad

The promise of good living conditions is made explicit by the sentences in bright red: “*Temperate Climate, Excellent Health, Pure and Abundant Water*”, “*The Best Stock Country in the World*”. Like the previous posters under study, emphasis on the use of the colour red is recurrent in railroad advertising.

Most importantly, such attractive living conditions are presented as realistic, as conveyed by the clause: “*IF YOU WANT A FARM OR HOME*” and “*The Best Thing in The West*” signs at the top of the poster. This argument is further emphasised through illustrated comparisons at the centre. These contain idealised representations of the evolution of a “*prairie*” and a “*woodland*” before and after “*years of work and profit*”. As if promoting the efficiency of a product, the cultivation qualities of western lands are advertised (e.g. the “*GOOD SOIL FOR WHEAT, CORN AND FRUIT*” sign). As expected, the railroad is represented as being the essential element to reach such success. This is transcribed by the fact that the locomotive was placed right in the middle. Strikingly, the locomotive is surrounded with what seems to be beams of light. Such a decidedly artistic choice seems to reflect the “miraculous” and exceptional nature of the railroad at the time.

The success of such adverts may explain the growth of agriculture in western territories in the early 1870s. Over the period, the West effectively became the granary of the nation. Lands which were before considered as the “American desert”, had now been turned into fields of corn and wheat. The advent of new farmer families in the West rapidly increased agricultural production and this at a remarkable speed. Simultaneously, as the East became gradually more industrialised, it was growingly more dependent on western production, thus expanding both the market and overall production of the U.S..

Yet, although the very first years of activity of the transcontinental railroad triggered great enthusiasm among the population, it was soon to be replaced by growing scepticism, thus changing the way the railroad was perceived by the population. More precisely, the economic competition which originally allowed its construction, eventually became its weakest point. The U.S. was indeed entering a period of economic depression, known as the “Panic”. From 1873 to 1876, North America was struck by a financial crisis, which pushed promoters to stop investing in the railroad. Both western and eastern farmers were the first ones to be affected by such economic depression, as they relied on the railroad to transport their crops. This notably led to the beginning of the “Granger Movement”, created by farmers to express their grievances against the railroad, which often had anti-farmers practices. This growing anti-railroad feeling was described by Robert E. Riegel in the following terms:

Mistakes, fraud, misrepresentation, and over-development could all secure a certain amount of immunity during a period of economic prosperity, but when the good times were succeeded by depression, such evils received an accumulated amount of criticism and opposition.

Riegel, Robert E. *The Story of the Western Railroads: From 1852 through the Reign of the Giants*. Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1964. Ch. IX, p. 129

By mistakes, fraud, misrepresentation, and over-development, what is meant is the spread corruption among railroad promoters during the first years of the transcontinental line. Promoters engaged in fierce competition against each other, and consequently resorted to all kinds of strategies to occupy more territory than their opponents. This implied economic and material waste but dishonest deals as well. A capitalisation that reached a saturation point during the Panic. As said earlier, farmers were the most affected by this economic depression and precisely because of the arguments promoted by the previous advertisement. The reason they had settled in the West was because of the advantages and

benefits it stood for, precisely, for the “American Dream”⁵ it embodied. This representation of the West being a land of opportunity and prosperity collapsed during the Panic, as further explained by Robert E. Riegel: “The advantages for which the westerner had dreamed, prayed, and worked, turned into a machinery of oppression before his very eyes. [The railroad] began to be judged on the basis of unrealized hopes rather than of dreams which might still be fulfilled.” (*The Story of the Western Railroads* (1926), Ch.IX, p. 138) Farmers who worked for several railroad companies saw the price of their production drop, which greatly impacted their living conditions. The growth of anti-railroad feelings among farmers led to the Granger Movement to express their grievances in newspapers, through the medium of cartoons. (Cf. Appendix A)

⁵ The “American Dream” as in the notion the American social, economic, and political system makes success possible for every ambitious individual.

II. The “Golden Age”

If the general excitement for the railroad among the American population lost momentum in the 1870s, it was to remain brief. This short period of depression was only to give greater amplitude to the impact railroads would have on American society, as stated by the historian Robert E. Riegel:

The depression of the seventies included within itself the seeds of future prosperity. The whole country was in the process of economic transformation which was to produce a period of prosperity greater than anything that had gone before. Even more than everywhere else, the West was in the grip of changing conditions, which were destined to produce an entirely new era.

Riegel, Robert E. *The Story of the Western Railroads: From 1852 through the Reign of the Giants*. Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1964. Ch. X, p. 146

The railroad was indeed to enter its “golden age”. Before exploring the characteristics of the period, the term “golden age” must be clearly defined. In the context of this essay, what is meant by “golden age” is the metaphor used to describe a period where a high level of achievement was reached in a specific field. The concept of a “golden age” as in a “period of past perfection” was first found among Greek and Latin writers in the 1550s⁶. As this term is used to refer to a period of peak achievement, historians do not share a common definition of the golden age of American railroading. The time frame remains discussed among railroad historians. After careful consideration, the choice was made to define the period between the 1880s and the 1910s as the golden age of railroading in the context of this paper as it seems in lines with Jeffrey R. Long’s view that. This according to the perspective of the historian Jeffrey R. Long: “Prior to World War I, the phrase “Golden Age” was very prevalent with everything related to trains and everyone transported by the railroad.”⁷. Such time frame will thus be followed in this second part, excluding WWI as world wars will be dealt with in the third part of this essay.

⁶ (<https://www.etymonline.com/word/golden>, last accessed on August 11th, 2023)

⁷ Long R., Jeffrey. *The History and Evolution of the American Railroad*, Pennsylvania State Univ., 2016. Ch. IV, p. 86

a. A glorious era for the railroad, seen as an unstoppable source of progress

In the 1880s, the American railroad entered an unprecedented era. This was strikingly visible by the tremendous growth of its network. In 1880, the network consisted of approximately 93,000 miles and was to grow to a peak of about 254,000 miles in 1916, showing its size had almost tripled. The significant development of the rail network is put forwards by Jonathan Matusitz: “Trips that once took several weeks now took a couple of days. Railroads tied the country together, brought the Eastern and Western coasts of America’s vast continent closer, and accelerated the growth of the United States.”⁸

Given its revolutionary nature, the railroad had little competition from other modes of transportation. If the extension of the network played a major part in establishing its dominance among others means of transport, it was the fact the railroad had gone from a stage of early construction to a state of consolidation that explained the success it achieved in the 1880s and the following decades. The eighties were synonym of technological improvement: new lines were built but old ones were reinforced to answer passenger and freight demand; locomotives of greater power were created and improved constantly; a more secure and effective signalling system was developed; and standard time and standard gauge⁹ had been achieved. Such elements greatly helped in making the operating system more efficient and in reaching uniformity. The railroad surpassed any other mode of transportation.

However, although this represented a “golden” time for the railroad, the same cannot be said about the wider historical context of the period. Such technological improvement must be contrasted with the era the U.S. had just entered: the Gilded Age. Starting from the late 1870s and ending in the 1910s, the period was shaped by the new challenges industrialisation, immigration, the settlement in the west and the closing of the Frontier represented. Although the era was marked by unprecedented economic growth, such wealth was not equally distributed. The industrial and technological innovations which created the prosperity of the time also led to great disparities between the growing class of capitalists and the working class. Mistreatment, monopolies, and corruption were common practices at the time, which gave rise to important novels of social and political criticism. The period precisely takes its name from Mark Twain’s satirical novel *The*

⁸ Matusitz, Jonathan. *The impact of the railroad on American society: a communication perspective of technology*. Univ. of Central Florida, 2009. p. 4

⁹ “gauge” in railroad transportation, is the width between the inside faces of running rails. (<https://www.britannica.com/technology/gauge-railroad-track>, last accessed on August 12th, 2023)

Gilded Age, published in 1873. The title was a metaphor for the blatant materialism of the period, hiding widespread corruption.

The railroad industry having been a defining element of the Gilded Age, it was not exempted from such practices. Railroad barons were in power to set high prices to travellers, farmers, and suppliers as to amass greater wealth, and the industrial work needed for the network to function remained highly dangerous, leading to work accidents and despite such risks, remained low-paid. Thus feeding off the love hate relationship the American population had developed towards railroads in the past decades.

Nevertheless, the railroad was now more than ever associated with the notion of prosperity and progress. Such a phenomenon is illustrated by the following poster by the Illinois Central Railroad:



The world's railroad scene (1882), poster, Swain & Lewis

As stated by historian William L. Withuhn: “After the Civil War, railroads recognised the value of being as modern and up-to-date: this four-colour advertisement equates the railroad with progress”¹⁰ (*Rails Across America* (1993), p. 62)

In this case, train travelling is represented as a groundbreaking and yet dependable mode of transportation. As stated earlier, the railroad was not in its early years anymore and had gone through the consolidation and improvement of its network.

The representation of such technological innovations is embodied by the imposing locomotive in the centre. Its speed is so fast it has torn the map apart and seems to have frightened the horses on the left. Consequently, these elements illustrate how fast travelling by train across the states has now become.

Moreover, the fact the lines covered by the Illinois Central Railroad are highlighted in vivid red seems to testify to the wide expansion of railroads during the decade. This is especially relevant in the case of the state of Illinois, which, at the time, possessed one of the most developed networks.

A comparison between steamboats and horse carriages also seems to be occurring in the background and corners of the poster. The horse carriage on the far right seems to illustrate how dangerous and perilous travelling by horse was in the past decades. This is conveyed through the way it seems to be losing balance and is represented in a hostile, mountainous environment. This small scene is embedded in the poster, giving the impression of a collage meant to show how far the U.S. had progressed in terms of transportation. However, the steamboat seems to be the only mode of transport having the potential to “keep up” with the railroad: it is in the background but is almost on the same level as the locomotive. Although the railroad had little competition, the steamboat sometimes indeed challenged rail travelling in terms of cost, as it was cheaper.

This idealistic depiction of the railroad at the time is made possible by several elements. Firstly, by the use of striking colours for the locomotive: their vivid nature conveys an idea of novelty, as if it had been freshly painted and as if the composing metal parts were brand new. Secondly, by the choice to place it in the very centre and to create the impression of a vanishing line with the cars following it. The engine is not only in the centre spatially-speaking but also seems to be at the heart of conversations due to its outstanding qualities. This is shown by the passengers waiting at the train station, which seem captivated by it and

¹⁰ Withuhn, William L. *Rails across America: A History of Railroads in North America*. Smithmark Publishers, 1993. p. 62

to be talking about. Moreover, the fact they are dressed fancily add to the idea of the Gilded Age being a prosperous period for America. Here, the railroad is literally depicted as the “talk of the town”.

This poster perfectly illustrates how “*the locomotive [was] almost universally hailed as a sign of mobility, prosperity, and progress.*”¹¹

¹¹ Withuhn, William L. *Rails across America: A History of Railroads in North America*. Smithmark Publishers, 1993. p. 51

b. “Railroads as the guardians of accurate timekeeping”

Railroads were now acknowledged for the technological progress they brought to American society as far as traveling was concerned. Yet, they were also responsible for another invention that would drastically impact the lifestyle of all Americans across the continent. An essential harmonisation which may not be expected to have originated from the railroad industry: the standardisation of time. The adoption of Standard Time occurred in 1883, following the need to establish a timekeeping method that could be applied on a national scale. Before its adoption, time was determined locally: a clock in the square of each town was set according to the position of the sun, i.e., “sun-time”. This meant time varied from town to town. Yet, to function properly, railroads needed to rely on precise time to coordinate the movements of the trains on their lines. Before time was standardised, companies relied on a complex system of timetables. As explained by the Smithsonian Institution: “Railroads operated on their own set of timetables and not always the same ones. Two trains on the same track could have two different times, which meant unsafe traveling conditions and collisions.”¹² A complex system travel guides attempted to simplify for the public and which the well-known example was the *Travelers’ Official Guide*. The guide, which was issued from 1868 until 2020, aimed at listing up-to-date passenger train schedules. As comprehensive as it was, it then became the only authorised source of information passengers could rely on to find the timetable of their line.

The adoption of Standard Time in 1883 was to deal with the issue permanently. Although it was first exclusively adopted by railroad systems, it was only to be officially applied by the entirety of American society in 1918 through the Standard Time Act. Standard Time introduced the notion of time zones, which divided the continent into four: Pacific Time, Mountain Time, Central Time, and Eastern Time. (Cf. Appendix B) The idea of four time zones had been brought up a decade earlier by Charles F. Dowd in his pamphlet *A System of National Time for Railroads* (1870), who was a Yale-educated school principal.

A novelty that triggered mixed reactions among the American population, who were more or less open to adopt a time imposed by the already monopolistic railroad industry. The introduction of standard time was a drastic change in American lives, as described by a journalist in the *Indianapolis Sentinel* newspaper, days after its adoption:

Railroad time is to the time of the future. The Sun is no longer to boss the job. People—all 55,000,000 of them—must eat, sleep and work as well as travel by railroad time. It is a revolt, a rebellion. The sun will be requested to rise and set by railroad time. The planets must, in the future, make their circuits by such timetables as railroad magnates arrange.

¹² When the Standardization of Time Arrived in America, Smithsonian Podcast, 2016

People will have to marry by railroad time, and die by railroad time. Ministers will be required to preach by railroad time—banks will open and close by railroad time [...]

*Excerpt from an article published in the Indianapolis Sentinel newspaper
(21 November 1883)*

Naturally, the precision tools watches and clocks represented were to become even more prominent. Not only did they facilitate the application of standard time, but they also became an essential symbol of railroad culture. The entire network depended on clocks, watches, and detailed guidelines as how to use time. Employees such as engineers and conductors were required to carry an approved watch. The type, accuracy and condition of every watch used on the network had to be checked by the railroad's time service department. Their necessity pushed American companies to mass-produce "railroad-grade" pocket watches¹³, which were to be used by both railroad employees and the population. More than a practical object, the watch became a "badge of distinction" for railroad workers, which would then become "family heirlooms"¹⁴ according to the historian William L. Withuhn. (*Rails Across America* (1993), p.66).

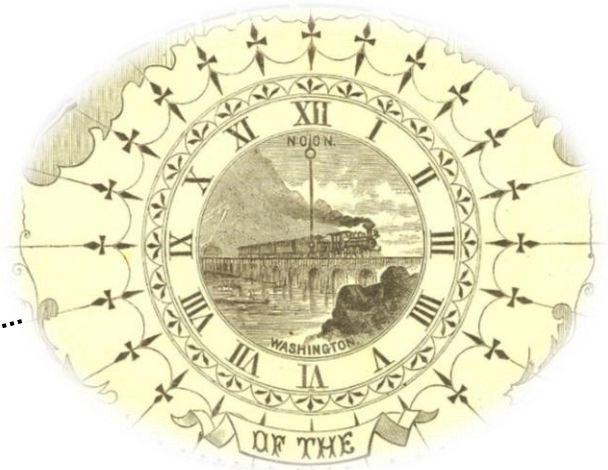
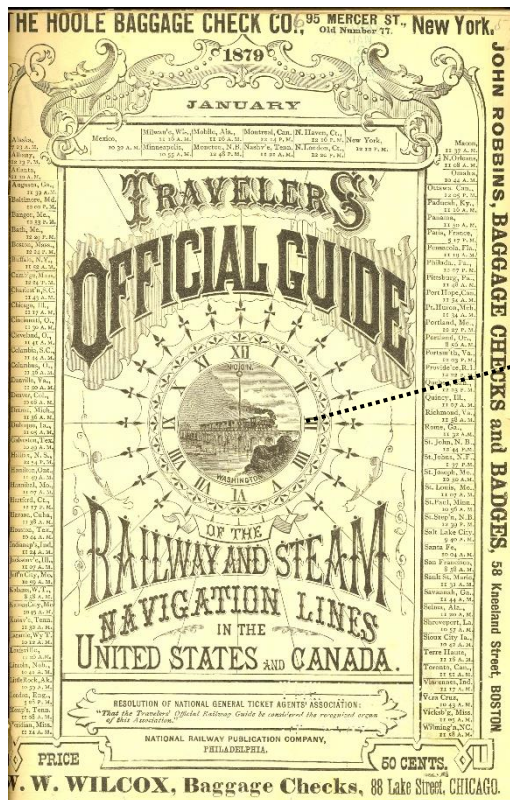
Whether they relied on complex timetables or standard time, such events helped shaping "the tradition of railroads as the guardians of accurate timekeeping"¹⁵.

As mentioned earlier, the *Travelers' Official Guide* was undeniably the reference for any individual willing to travel by train. Due to the clarity it brought in railroad time organisation, the company issuing the guide began adopting symbols associated with temporality. Representation and aesthetic choices which would help foster the cultural conception of railroads being the embodiment of timekeeping. A fact strikingly reflected by the January 1879 edition of the *Official Guide*:

¹³ A watch that was approved by a particular railroad organisation for use by conductors on their rail. (<https://vorticwatches.com/blogs/the-vortic-blog/railroad-grade-pocket-watches>, last accessed on August 8th, 2023)

¹⁴ Withuhn, William L. *Rails across America: A History of Railroads in North America*. Smithmark Publishers, 1993. p.66

¹⁵ Withuhn, William L. *Rails across America: A History of Railroads in North America*. Smithmark Publishers, 1993. p.66



Travelers' Official Guide, January 1879 (before Standard Time), by Allen's National Railway Publication Co.

Attention must be paid to the meticulously detailed illustration at the heart of the cover. The choice was made to represent a steam locomotive passing on a viaduct in a circular frame. By the roman numerals surrounding it, the intention to represent either a clock or a watch can be guessed. The hour hand-like signs pointing towards the centre of the illustration participate to the illusion of a timepiece.

The cultural representation of railroads being “guardians of time” seems to be visually made explicit in this cover. This due to the locomotive having been placed at the heart of the timepiece, as if being its central piece. Thus suggesting the engine owns control of it, and by extension, of time.

Moreover, a metaphor is at stake here. As the numerals and hour-hands all gravitate around the circle frame, this gives the impression of an orbit, in which the locomotive would be the sun and the hour-hands the satellites gravitating around it. All these elements could be interpreted as a metaphor for railroad time replacing sun-time.

c. The making of a consumer society

If railroads were perceived as the embodiment of progress and timekeeping, they were also to be associated with a new economic and social system gaining momentum throughout the Gilded Age: consumerism. Precisely, they would participate in the shaping of the consumer society as it is known today. In the context of this essay, what is meant by “consumer society” is “a society in which a large part of [the population]’s sense of identity and meaning is achieved through the purchase and use of consumer goods and services”¹⁶ through the lens of American history and sociology.

Before the advent of the railroad, delivering products from western regions to eastern regions and vice versa was an arduous process. In western rural areas, communities remained mostly isolated, making obtaining machinery, equipment, and more casual items from the East difficult. Simultaneously, supplying western goods to factories and markets to the East implied expensive, long journeys by land or sea, thus restricting food supplies to what was locally cultivated.

The technological progress brought about by the railroad in the Gilded Age was to put an end to such practices. Moving raw materials and finished goods across the continent was greatly eased. Products were transported by train from factories and warehouses to local freight offices. Such transportation improvements also benefited the American population at large: as goods could easily be sold to either part of the continent, their value significantly dropped, making them affordable to a greater number of people. Items which were considered luxurious before were now available to a wider population. This greatly changed the perception Americans had towards goods and shaped new consuming habits, which would eventually play a major role in class distinction. As described by William L. Withuhn: “Pioneers [had] turned into consumers.” (*Rails Across America* (1993), p. 100)

The growth of such consumer society was noticeable through American visual advertising culture, which was to know an unprecedented wave. In the 1880s, printings technologies had considerably improved and manufacturing costs had dropped drastically. Consequently, companies saw in it the opportunity to give away promotional objects to shippers, government officials and politicians. A great variety of them were produced: from “classic” paper items, such as flyers, postcards, and booklets; to more sophisticated ones, such as calendars, pins, toys, etc.

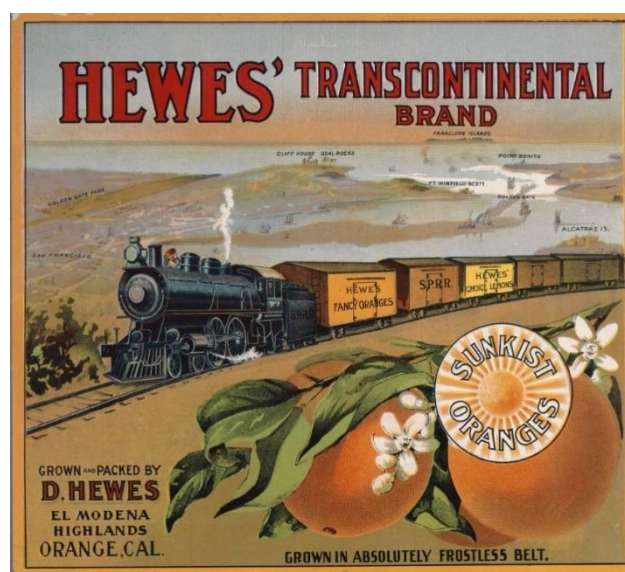
¹⁶ Goodwin Neva, Nelson Julie, Roach Bryan. *Consumption and the Consumer Society*, Tufts Univ., 2019.

No different from other companies, manufacturing ones adopted such practices. Precisely by using the authority of railroads and the freight services they relied on to transport their goods to their advantage. A marketing strategy which would later lead to direct association between railroads and consumer goods.



Advertising items of all kinds, (Withuhn, William L. *Rails across America: A History of Railroads in North America*. Smithmark Publishers, 1993. p. 100-101)

The birth of such association between railroads and the goods they were delivering could be illustrated by the following paper, advertising a product shown in the picture above: “Sunkist Oranges” promoted by *Hewes' Transcontinental Brand*.



Hewes' Transcontinental Brand paper promoting “Sunkist Oranges” from California (1910)

As briefly mentioned earlier, one common practice for manufacturers was to mass produce “giveaway” paper items, on which they would advertise their brand and logo. This was a practice railroads had also adopted early in the history of their advertising. As mentioned earlier in this essay, for their advertisements, railroad companies had taken inspiration from American political campaigns, where promotional techniques consisted in using colourful graphics and memorable, concise slogans (Cf. Appendix C). A link could therefore be established between railroad and consumer good advertising techniques. Given the prominence of railroads, good manufacturers potentially adopted the codes of their advertising, seeing how striking and effective they were on the public.

The use of colourful graphics for the paper is noticeable: attention is drawn to the “Sunkist Oranges”, which were put in the foreground and illustrated using vivid orange tones. A logo was also created to promote the oranges, overlapping them. The logo associating the oranges with a sun, aims at reminding the viewer of their origin: California. An aesthetic choice which, on another note, contributes to the conception of the west being an ideal, bountiful place. At the top of the paper, a solid red was also chosen to highlight the name of the brand.

Similarly to railroad adverts, the use of concise slogans is present, as shown by the sentences “*GROWN IN ABSOLUTELY FROSTLESS BELT.*” and “*GROWN AND PACKED BY D. HEWES*” at the bottom.

Lastly, another element which is less linked to political campaigns but rather to railroad advertising on its own is the detailed artwork provided on the paper. In the 19th and early 20th century, railroad adverts often displayed sophisticated artworks. As explored earlier in this essay, such artworks often represented the sceneries passengers could discover by rail traveling, a technique to attract tourists and travellers. A feature which is also present in the “Sunkist Oranges” ad, where the landscapes of the state of California are represented through a map-like illustration in the background. Emblematic Californian places such as “*SAN FRANCISCO*”, “*GOLDEN GATE (BRIDGE)*”, “*ALCATRAZ ISLAND*”, etc., are brought forward. Another key element which must be noted is the locomotive itself being the central element of the advert. As seen through numerous examples in this essay, locomotives were almost systematically put in the centre, representing the heart of any railroad activity. In this case, the manufacturer Hewes decided to promote its products on the cars composing the locomotive: “*HEWES’ FANCY ORANGES*”, “*HEWES’ CHOICE LEMONS*”. On another one, these elements testify to the development of refrigerated railroad cars in the 1880s, whose first model was created in 1878. An invention that made carrying fresh fruits and vegetables from the south to the east by all

seasons. A direct reference to the railroad line used to deliver such products is also made on of the cars: “*S.P.R.R.* ” standing for “Southern Pacific Railroad”.

As William L. Withuhn writes: “railroads were some of the first businesses to recognize the power of brand-name association and of bold logos.”¹⁷, which could explain the potential visual influence they had over other markets.

¹⁷ Withuhn, William L. *Rails across America: A History of Railroads in North America*. Smithmark Publishers, 1993. p.116

III. Hard Times & Decline

If the Gilded Age had given an almost unstoppable momentum to railroads, they were to start experiencing hardships that were to destabilise it. Especially in the middle of the 1910s, were they found themselves in a challenging landscape. As stated by John F. Stover: “Railroads experienced one of the most difficult financial periods in the years just before Americans became involved in WWI.”¹⁸ This was mainly due to the continuous rise in the cost of railroad operation with no earnings to compensate on the other hand. As well as government regulation, which was becoming increasingly prominent through new laws expanding federal control. Railroads were also starting to face new competition from the trucking industry and the automobile, new transport solutions which were starting to gain ground.

Yet, in the following years, railroads were to face another unexpected and unprecedented obstacle.

¹⁸ Stover, John F. *American Railroads*. Univ. of Chicago Press, 1961. Ch.VII, p. 181

a. “Keep ‘em going!”: The railroad as the backbone of the war effort

When the U.S. declared war on Germany on April 6th, 1917, railroads were called upon to become the backbone of “The Great War”. According to John F. Stover, during WWI, the rail network was to endorse two roles: “meet the unprecedented transportation demands of a domestic economy preparing for total conflict” and “supply the Allies in Europe, who seemed to have an insatiable appetite for more and more war matériel.”¹⁹ Railroads were indeed to be responsible for the transport of troops, supplies, munitions, and artillery for American defence. American railroads also greatly participated in providing war material to European Allies. Throughout the war, several attempts would be needed to answer such demands.

In the first attempt, instantly after war was declared Daniel Willard, president of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad and chairman of the Advisory Commission of the Council of National Defense, asked the most prominent rail executives to gather in Washington, D.C. The same day on April 11th, 1917, close to seven hundred railroad presidents signed a resolution in which they agreed to contribute to the war effort. The presidents agreed for their lines to unify in one single continental railroad system. To co-ordinate this new unification, the railroads created a five-member “Railroads’ War Board”.

However, such unification did not prove sufficient, and eventually led to a transportation crisis in December 1917. Railroads had shown their inability to coordinate answer war demands. Facing crisis, the U.S. government decided to experiment with nationalisation, which gave way to the creation of the United States Railroad Administration (USRA) on December 26th, 1917. The entirety of the railroads was now placed under the authority of the USRA, which operated them under one single system. Competition among rail companies had now been removed. The nationalisation of the rail network proved successful and lasted for three years, despite having been strongly criticised for its intense practices, often causing overexploitation of the infrastructure.

Railroad owners feared this unprecedented nationalisation was to lead to permanent federal control and that the industry was unlikely to return to private ownership. To ease tensions, President Thomas Woodrow Wilson addressed the following message to rail executives: “If I have taken the task out of their hands, it has not been because of any dereliction or failure on their part, but only because there were some things which the Government can do and private management cannot.”²⁰ President Woodrow Wilson then proceeded to ensure the protection of

¹⁹ Stover, John F. *American Railroads*. Univ. of Chicago Press, 1961. Ch.VII, p. 185

²⁰ *The President's Address to Congress on Federal Control of Railroads*, January 4, 1918

the property rights of railroad owners, which was done on March 21st, 1918, through the Railroad Control Act. It specified that all lines would be handed back to their original owners within 21 months of a peace treaty. As expected, in less than two years after WWI ended, the USRA's authority ended officially on March 1st, 1920.

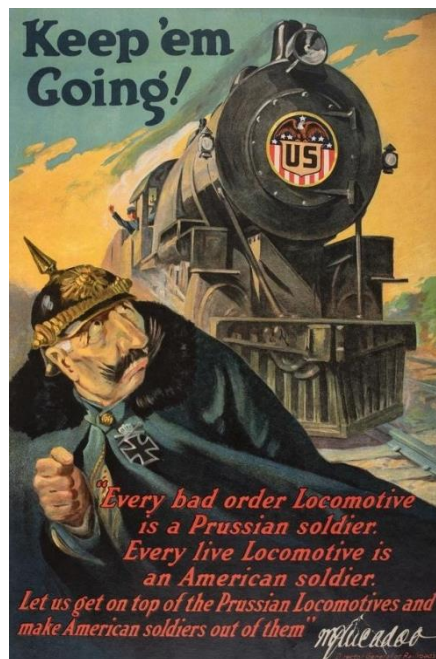
The consequences of such nationalisation led most companies to greatly invest in repairs and worn-out material. Nevertheless, the USRA is credited for having brought further standardised practices to the railroad industry.

To ensure such contribution to the war effort, nationalising lines was not sufficient. "Selling the war" to the American population was also a necessity. To attract citizens to enlist in the army forces, President Woodrow Wilson created the Committee on Public Information (CPI) on April 13th, 1917. The goal of the CPI was to influence public opinion to be in favour of the war. To that end, the CPI produced propaganda films, posters, books, pamphlets, and published advertisements in newspapers. The patriotic messages these promoted helped in justifying American participation in the "Great War", and convinced a great part of the population, who had before been in favour of peace. Despite successfully bringing more Americans to volunteer, after the war the public recognised the propaganda purposes of the CPI and the anti-German sentiment it aimed to spread among the population.

One impacting form of propaganda was visual art, and more specifically posters, as mentioned earlier. The U.S. are said to have produced more war posters than all others belligerent nations combined.²¹

²¹ According to the National WWI Museum & Memorial, U.S.A., (<https://wwichangedus.org/topics/selling-the-war/#topic-resources>, last accessed on August 23rd, 2023)

An example which can be observed below:



United States Railroad Administration (USRA) poster, (1918)

Following the codes of the CPI, the USRA also produced posters to attract civilians to enlist in the railroad forces.

This poster is a caricature of the German Emperor Wilhelm II, who is represented next to an intimidating American locomotive, as his expression and posture suggest. The poster features a quote by William G. McAdoo, appointed Director General of Railroads after the creation of the USRA. In this quote, William G. McAdoo creates a metaphor between locomotives, American and Prussian soldiers. Defective locomotives are being associated with Prussian soldiers, implying each deficient one would weaken American defence. Whereas on the other hand, operative locomotives are being compared to American soldiers, those who will strengthen national force. Direct association is consequently made between locomotives and soldiers contributing to the war effort. It could almost be said that the machines are close to being personified.

The usual promotional techniques used in American political campaigns can be found. The sentence “*Keep ‘em going!*” at the top stands as a memorable slogan, mimicking spoken American English, consequently creating a sense of proximity with the viewer. A colourful background was chosen to highlight the grey and black shades of the locomotive, giving it an intimidating, imposing nature. The only colourful element composing it is an American emblem, representing the U.S. flag and a bald eagle.

Therefore, the poster seems to serve two purposes. One is to influence American men to join the war effort by working in the railroad, and the other is to trigger an anti-German sentiment in the viewer as to justify American involvement in the war.

When it was thought the nation was not to experience a conflict of the same magnitude twice, the U.S. was to face a second world war in the 1940s. One day after the bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese navy on December 7th, 1941, the U.S. declared war on Japan. A few days later, Germany and Italy declared war on the U.S. in response. The nation was now to become fully engaged in WWII.

Prior to the full involvement of the U.S., President Franklin D. Roosevelt had already authorised the shipment of supplies to support the Allies in September 1940, due to the gravity of the situation. As Jeffrey R. Long remarks: “*Railroads still represented the most modern and fastest method for moving freight and people on a massive scale. Along with transport of troops, the railroads moved tanks, trucks, jeeps, and all types of artillery supplies.*” (*The History and Evolution of the American Railroad* (2016), Ch. IV, p. 87-88)”

Yet, if railroads were to be called upon to be the backbone of the war effort once again, they were to be operated differently. As stated by John F. Stover: “Twenty years later, when war again came to America, the railroads remembered the unpalatable years of federal operation and resolved to do their job by themselves.”²² This time, railroad owners did their best to avoid the potential second nationalisation of their lines. Railroad companies expressed their will to cooperate with government as to prevent federal control, which proved successful. Throughout the war, the rail network met the colossal transport demands of WWII, and this without guidance from the government.

Thanks to the experience gained through WWI, railroads stood better prepared to face such important traffic. Moreover, the 1940s were marked by great technology improvements, which greatly helped in meeting requirements. For instance, the advent of diesel-electric locomotives, heavier freight cars and Centralised Traffic Control (CTC)²³ were essential to the network. However, wartime restrictions prevented companies from buying such diesel models, which led

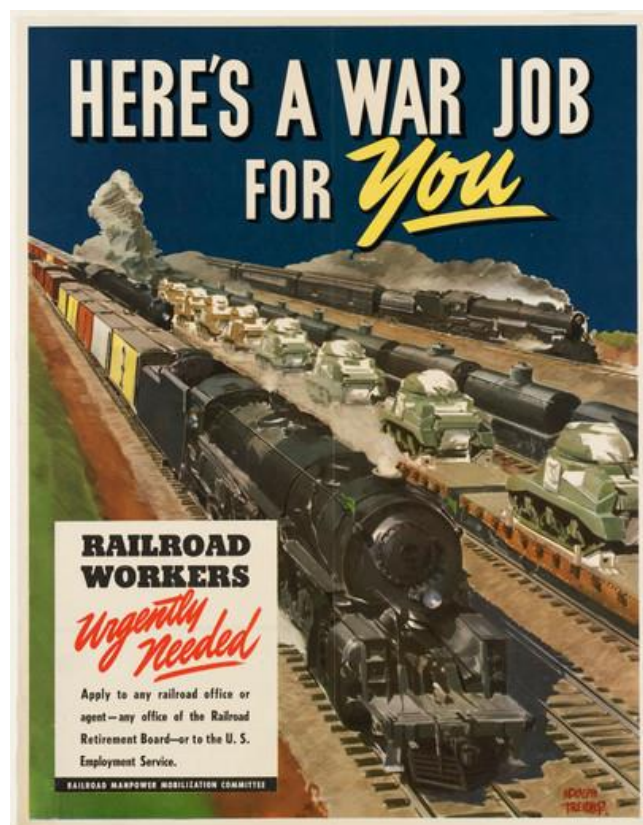
²² Stover, John F. *American Railroads*. Univ. of Chicago Press, 1961. Ch.VII, p. 181-182

²³ Centralized traffic control (CTC) is a signalling system used by railroads. The system consists of a centralized train dispatcher's office that controls railroad switches in the CTC territory and the signals that railroad engineers must obey in order to keep the traffic moving safely and smoothly across the railroad. (<https://en-academic.com/dic.nsf/enwiki/651825>, last accessed on August 24th, 2023)

to the massive use of “Super Power”²⁴, articulated steam locomotives. A famous example being the Union Pacific Big Boy. These more powerful locomotives could travel at significantly higher speeds and carry more cars.

The success of the operations gave railroads a new momentum, which gained back the recognition they had lost during WWI.

In the same fashion as WWI, ensuring the human war effort in the railroad was mainly done through propaganda. WWII saw an unprecedented wave of propaganda campaigns, greater in scale and variety. This time, the dissemination of propaganda material was executed by the Office of War Information (OWI), created by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on June 13th, 1942. The U.S. were, once again, the greatest producer of propaganda resources among all fighting countries. Visual media remained vital for war recruitment, as effective as it was, posters were mass produced.



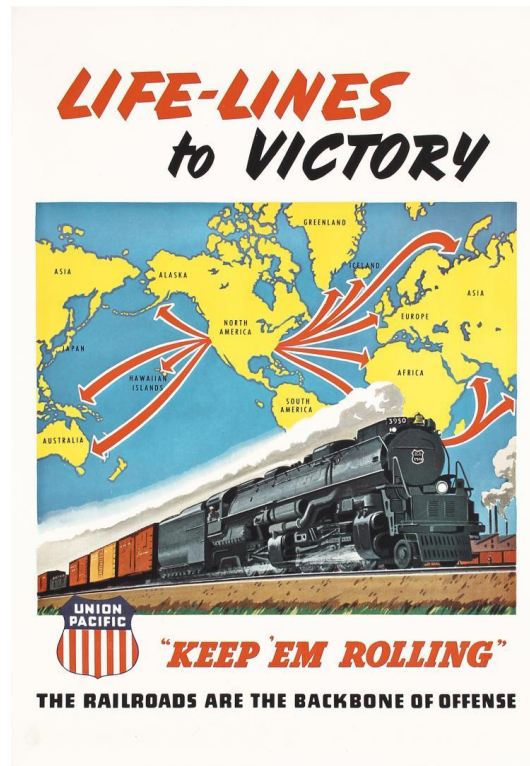
WWII Propaganda (Railroad Manpower Mobilization Committee poster (1944), Artist: Adolf Treider)

²⁴ Steam locomotives with booster-equipped four-wheel trailing trucks supporting large fireboxes, as well as enlarged superheaters. They were first produced by the Lima Locomotives Works company, which gave them their name. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Superpower_steam, last accessed on August 24th, 2023)

This poster promoted by the Railroad Manpower Mobilization Committee illustrates how the recruitment of railroad employees was achieved through advertising. Notably from the striking note at the bottom left of the poster stating: “*RAILROAD WORKERS Urgently Needed*”. The slogan clearly addresses individuals were invited to apply to “*any railroad office or agent*” or to “*the U.S. Employment Service*”.

WWII posters did not only share similarities with WWI visual propaganda in terms of messages, but it also used similar visual codes. The same promotional devices used in American political campaigns are present. What is likely to be the most eye-catching element is the catchphrase situated at the top: “*HERE’S A WAR JOB FOR YOU*”. The terms are highlighted through luminous colours, such as white and yellow. The stress it put on the term “YOU” through both yellow letters and by being underlined, thus directly addressing the viewer. A rich palette of colours presents itself to the viewer, creating again a contrast between the locomotives and its immediate surroundings. The deep blue of the sky and the rich green of the terrain creates a disparity between their natural – almost romantic – qualities and the dark tones and industrial characteristics of the locomotives. Specifically, the steam locomotives featured in this poster are “Big Boys”, evoked earlier on. The choice was made to represent them in action, directly contributing to the war effort by hauling heavy tanks and supplies. Their presence almost occupies the whole space. The strength and power of the “super steam” locomotives are consequently put forward, potentially triggering a feeling of pride for American railroads in the viewer’s eyes and maybe convincing them to participate in such admirable actions.

However, improvements can be felt in the quality of the design and in the printing. Greater emphasis is stressed on the visual quality and definition of the illustration. The epic visuals of the poster may remind the viewer of a painting or even a movie poster. Hiring artists to create such propaganda material played a major role in their attractiveness.



WWII Propaganda (Union Pacific poster (1944), Artist: William Willmarths)

In a similar style as the WWI posters, representing the significant participation of railroads in the war effort were also created. As stated by the slogan at the bottom of the paper, associating them with the notion of “*OFFENSE*”. An offense made possible by the transport of war supplies to the Allies, as suggested by the map and red arrows in the background. As Jeffrey R. Long notes:

During the war, railroads were carrying raw materials to factories that were converted to making military supplies along with delivering finished goods to overseas ports. The two-front war enabled railroads to transport food, materials, and supplies to both the east and west coast ports involving much of the rail service across the country.²⁵

The “Big Boys” or the locomotives used by the railroad forces are consequently depicted as war weapons. Another way to remind the general population that railroads had a direct

²⁵ Long R., Jeffrey. *The History and Evolution of the American Railroad*, Pennsylvania State Univ., 2016. p. 88

consequence on war and how crucial their role was, notably by resorting to the term “*LIFE-LINES*” to describe the rail network.

Lastly, the catchphrase “*KEEP ‘EM ROLLING*” recalls the imperative slogans used during WWI campaigns.

When WWII reached its end in the U.S., railroads had proven their status as backbone of the war effort. Transporting such material would not have been achievable without them, which naturally made the American population associate them with military defence.

Surprisingly, if railroads had gained recognition for their military use during WWII, they started gaining back the interest Americans had for them before their reputation began declining. Unexpectedly for railroad companies, the general American population indeed started travelling by train again. Despite the presence of the automobile, which was becoming increasingly common in American lives. Railroad owners hoped for this phenomenon to widen and last throughout post-war years. A wish that was to remain unfulfilled by the transport competition railroads were about to enter.

b. Competitiveness among transport facilities: The arrival of the automobile & other attractive facilities

Starting from the end of WWII, railroads were to enter a slow, long period of decline, which would last until the 1970s. As stated by Jeffrey R. Long:

After the end of World War II, with manufacturing returning to domestic production, railroad companies were optimistic they could rebound from their pre-war decline. Railroads were operating at a high point and thought that the future was bright. But developments such as the interstate highway system and better air travel meant that the railroads would face competition like never before.²⁶

To better understand the critical situation railroads ended up in, attention must be paid to the 1910s and 1920s, which were to set the tone for WWII post-war years. As briefly mentioned earlier in this third part, competitive transport facilities started to appear as soon as the 1910s. Among these were new modes of transport by highway, such as the private automobile, the truck, and the motorbus, which could now be driven on the newly built ones. The 1920s then marked the advent of the airplane, with private commercial airlines developing across the country. The automobile had now gained significant ground within American families, with private motor vehicle registrations reaching unprecedented numbers and an increase in non-commercial intercity traffic. Challenged by the arrival of new means of transport, railroads began losing their monopoly status, as they started losing both passenger and freight traffic. The positive perception the American population had of railroads naturally started fading. The better service, fares and material provided by other transports led the national rail network to gradually weaken. In the eyes of investors and the general public, railroads had failed adjusting to the transport revolution of the 1920s.

The gap between rail travel and other means of transport was to widen in the 1950s and 1960s. A few years after WWII when railroads had gained a new momentum, their economic status severely worsened. The main cause of this economic plight originated from the governmental will to develop an interstate highway system. During the 1950s, the Eisenhower administration aimed at building further highways across the nation. A project that was to take shape through the National Interstate and Defence Highways Act, passed on June 29th, 1956. The creation of the interstate highway system remains the most important public works project in the history of the nation. Interstate highways answered the demands of Americans traveling less than 300

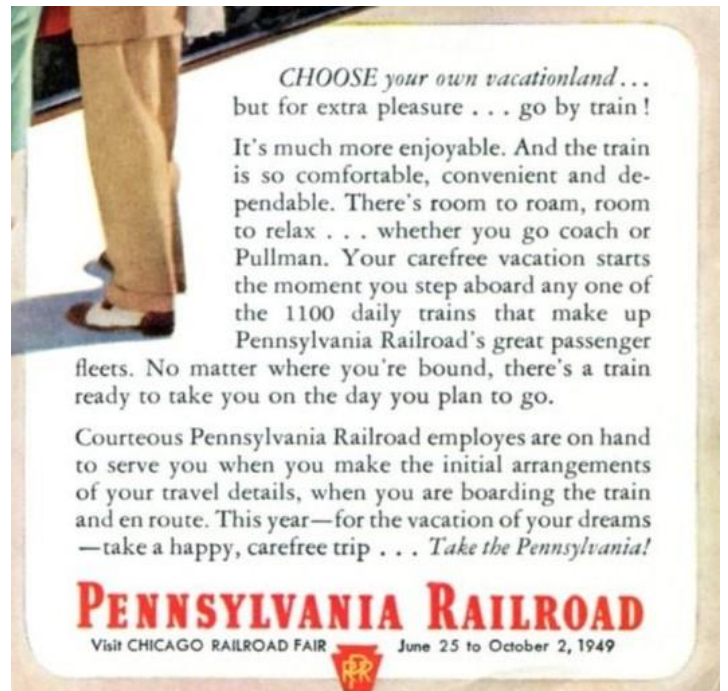
²⁶ Long R., Jeffrey. *The History and Evolution of the American Railroad*, Pennsylvania State Univ., 2016. p. 88-89

miles. Goods were also growingly being shipped by truck companies, which now provided door to door service. This led rail freight activities to drastically drop in the late 1950s. Moreover, air travel had entered its “golden age” and was associated with high-quality service and glamour. A reputation that was to attract many more passengers.

Lastly, in the 1960s, the significant rise in labour costs for passenger trains pushed the American population to resort to alternative means of transport. This now irreversible change in transport habits led rail companies to struggle financially so that a great portion became subject to bankruptcy. With fewer travellers on board, railroads began reducing their passenger service until it became entirely suppressed from their lines. As a final move to avoid bankruptcy, rail companies began merging. The newly formed mergers did, however, not give companies a new momentum, but rather worsened their financial situation. The best-known example was the wide “Penn Central” system, which was the fusion between the New York Central and the Pennsylvania Railroad. Both lines did not manage to operate harmoniously, due to the incompatibility of their operating approaches, i.e., signal and computer systems. Such disparities led to lost waybills²⁷, merchandise and even to one lost train. The merger was so disastrous, that, according to Jeffrey R. Long: “by early 1970, Penn Central was losing one million dollars a day. In June of that year, Penn Central filed for bankruptcy, this being one of the largest business failures in United States history.”²⁸

²⁷ A rail waybill is a rail transport document used as a contract of carriage between the railway administrator and the shipper or consignee of the shipment. (<https://www.freightcourse.com/rail-waybill/>, last accessed on August 30th, 2023)

²⁸ Long R., Jeffrey. *The History and Evolution of the American Railroad*, Pennsylvania State Univ., 2016. p. 89-90



All Aboard... For A Happy Vacation Go By Train! Pennsylvania Railroad poster (1949)

When railroads lost their monopoly status and became greatly impacted by transport competitiveness, companies were bound to resort to advertising techniques which they had long stopped using. Rail companies were now facing more than serious competition and had to face the attractiveness of automobiles, buses, trucks, and planes.

Compared to its early development in the 1860s, the railroad was not at the heart of the transport revolution which had started in the 1920s and lasted throughout the 1950s and 1960s. In its early years – as seen in the first part of this essay – railroads could use greater speed and their revolutionary industrial infrastructures as arguments to attract new passengers. This could not be the case anymore, with other means of transport surpassing the railroad on such points. What was left for rail companies was to use the few remaining arguments in their favour. That is comfort, carefreeness, safety, and the opportunity to admire outstanding panoramas, as illustrated by the Pennsylvania Railroad poster above. Although the popular modes of transport could provide such service to some extent, rail companies played on the singularity of rail travel, an experience which could not be replicated by other transport options.

Firstly, when paying attention to the overall appearance of the advert, a rather idealistic, “tranquil” vision of train travel is depicted. The choice was made to represent the archetype of

an American family going on a trip, wearing elegant dresses and hats, as visible on the left. Their facial expressions suggest their delight. They also seem to be having a pleasant interaction with the baggage handler, who is smiling too and lives up to the reputation of the “*courteous Pennsylvania railroad employees*”, as promoted by the company in the paragraph composing the ad on the bottom right. The little boy is even waving, supposedly at the viewer. The family is also carrying what seems to be magazines, items associated with leisure time. In the background, the train was represented in a flamboyant red, a choice made to make it more eye-striking and exaggerate the colour intensity of the original Pennsylvania passenger cars. Moreover, the colour red is often associated with luxury, a visual device to make viewers unconsciously pair train travel with comfort, as suggested by the use of the adjective “*comfortable*”. Lastly, the scene taking place on the left comes in contrast with the cloudy light blue sky in the background, evoking a “perfect”, temperate weather.

All these elements come together to fuel the image of train travelling being “*much more enjoyable* [than other means of travel]”. An implicit comparison made by rail companies, which may have chosen to remain prudent by not naming other modes of transport.

Overall, by the term “*enjoyable*” what is implied is that travelling by train is “*comfortable*”, “*convenient*”, “*dependable*” and enables the traveller to be “*carefree*”. The experience of rail travel is associated with “*extra pleasure*”, “*room to roam/to relax*”, and this regardless of budget (“*whether you go Pullman²⁹ or coach*”). Another point to attract customers from all backgrounds.

Finally, the poster emphasizes on the flexibility of rail lines by mentioning the great amount of schedules available: “*the 1100 daily trains that make up Pennsylvania Railroad’s great passengers fleet*”. This illustrates the attempt from railroad companies to fight back competition with faster and more frequent schedules. An argument that may have proven less convincing and successful, given the almost infinite travelling flexibility offered by private automobiles.

This poster testifies to the promoter’s wish to maintain the positive reputation they had among the American population by achieving a “leisurely” and family-friendly image.

²⁹ Pullman cars were railroad sleeping cars which were built and operated on most U.S. railroads by the Pullman Company.

c. Dieselisation, the failed, last attempt at “modernising” the railroad in the eyes of the public

As railroads had entered a now irreversible phase of decline in post-WWII years, apart from promoting the unique quality of their passenger service, companies had bet on another point to save their lines: dieselisation. Betting on technological progress that companies was an attempt for companies to give a new image to railroads starting from the 1930s.

Despite the unstoppable competition growing among transports after WWII, rail transport remained a primary means of transportation in the country. A vital industry which kept on improving its system. Ever since its creation, the rail network relied on steam locomotives to provide their service. Steam engines, however, required “vigilant maintenance, constant lubrication, and frequent fuel and waters stops.”³⁰ Engineers had been working on the development of alternative locomotive designs over the previous decades for the first diesel locomotives to enter service in the 1920s. Compared to steam engines, diesels “required less maintenance, could travel farther between stops and used less fuel than steam locomotives.”³¹ On the threshold of this new era railroads were entering, the industry started massively shifting to diesel locomotives during the late 1930s. The transition would take an even greater momentum after WWII. When the diesel locomotive joined the railroad landscape, it did not only revolutionise the network, but significantly improved the overall efficiency of the system as well.

Given the decline companies were experiencing during post-war years, owners aimed at “modernising” the railroad in the eyes of the public. The technological progress diesels represented the perfect opportunity for railroads to renew their image. Starting from the 30s, the period witnessed “*the best efforts of railroads managers with imagination*” and designers to give diesel engines a “*modern outlook*”. (*American Railroads* (1961), John F. Stover, p. 237) Ralph Budd, the president of the Burlington Route³², was one of them. In 1934, he aimed at giving a new pulse to the passenger service which had lost significant clientele ever since the 1920s. The way he achieved it was by using “diesel power for his new “Zephyr” stream-liner passenger service.”³³

³⁰ South Dakota Historical Presentation Office, *South Dakota's Railroads: An Historic Context*. Published in 1998, revised in 2007. p. 23

³¹ South Dakota Historical Presentation Office, *South Dakota's Railroads: An Historic Context*. Published in 1998, revised in 2007. p. 23

³² “The Burlington Route” was the nickname given to the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad.

³³ Stover, John F. *American Railroads*. Univ. of Chicago Press, 1961. p. 230



Postcard photograph of the Pioneer Zephyr (Circa 1934 – 1935) by The Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad, commonly referred to as “The Burlington Route”

Adverts for the diesel locomotive “Zephyr” indeed reflect the early attempts for American railroads to “modernise” their public image, as illustrated by the one above.

The emphasis is put on the novelty of such engines, explicitly mentioned by the sentence: “*America’s First Diesel Streamline Train*” on the right.

As briefly mentioned earlier, companies did not exclusively rely on the arrival of diesel power to renew their image, but also on the “futuristic” designs given to their machines. A design for which the Zephyr was to become famous for, as “*THE MOST ILLUSTRIOUS RAILROAD TRAIN IN THE WORLD*” at the very bottom of the postcard. Starting from its name, inspired by the god of the west wind Zephyrus, the Zephyr was meant to embody renewal. The name was chosen by Ralph Budd, after having reread *The Canterbury Tales* (1387) by Geoffrey Chaucer.

The use of stainless-steel for its body was meant to convey modernity and sobriety. A characteristic that was chosen to be highlighted in this advert, basing itself on an actual photograph of the Zephyr. The exposure and the light tones of the picture were clearly edited to emphasise its shining, “polished” aspect.

The innovation the Zephyr was supposed to embody is not visible through the material used, but also through its shape. As William L. Withuhn notes: “as with other objects of industrial

design during the 30s, [diesels] sported flowing lines and graceful contours.”³⁴ This is due to the advent of a new generation of trains during dieselisation: streamliners. As their name imply, streamliners of “*streamline train[s]*” as mentioned on the postcard, are trains designed in a shape to reduce air resistance, giving them aerodynamic characteristics. The term was mainly applied to train models from the 1930s up to the 1950s, until streamlining became the norm in the railroad industry. The font used to describe the “*Burlington Zephyr*” also contributes to overall effect of an elegant means of transportation.

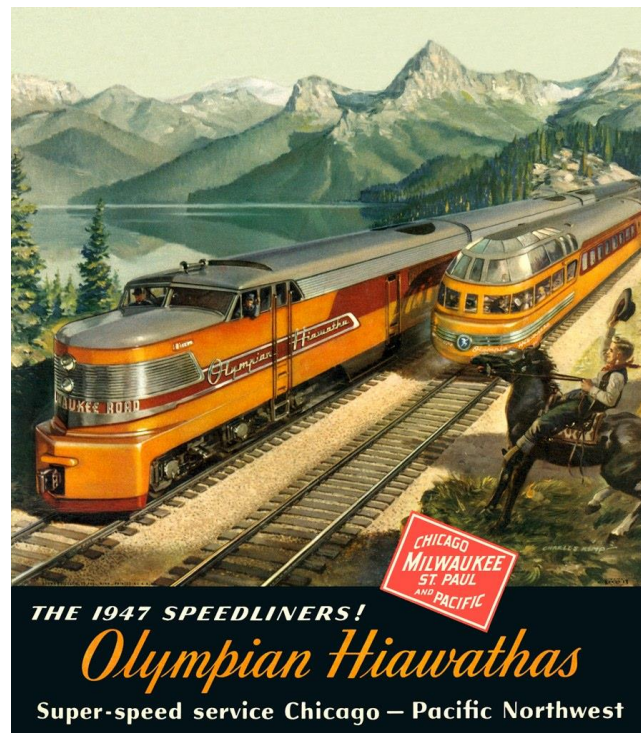
Lastly, an element that may be less noticeable is the subtle use of green tones for the windows of the Zephyr and for the frame of the postcard. Green is not only often used to symbolise renewal and growth, but is also used to represent technology and futuristic inventions.

The promotion of the “innovative” characteristics of the Zephyr proved successful: the newly introduced diesel locomotive was enthusiastically welcomed by the general public.

More than a decade later in the 1940s and 1950s, railroad companies continued resorting to such techniques, which had kept on evolving ever since and the train designs along with them. Still concerned by the ever-growing passenger losses, railroad companies yearned for their “modern” outlook to be further confirmed in the eye of the public. Yet, as time passed, modernity did not only consist in sobriety, elegance, and flowing lines anymore. To attract back passengers, companies began designing colourful ads, emphasising on the “fresh, modern look of brashly painted, streamlined diesels.”³⁵ Streamliners now also had to visually embody the speed diesel power gave them through eye-striking colours, giving them a “dynamic” look. It could even be supposed that railroad companies took inspiration from colourful sports cars, which were popular at the time. Companies may have wished to adopt some of the characteristics of their competitors, instead of “fighting” them. The following ad from the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad is the prime example.

³⁴ Withuhn, William L. *Rails across America: A History of Railroads in North America*. Smithmark Publishers, 1993. p. 142

³⁵ Withuhn, William L. *Rails across America: A History of Railroads in North America*. Smithmark Publishers, 1993. p. 152



Advertisement from the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad, commonly referred to as the “Milwaukee Road”, promoting its new train models “Olympian Hiawathas” (1947)

This advert interestingly promotes two types of train sets, both belonging to the family of “Olympian Hiawathas” as mentioned at the very bottom in bold orange characters.

The colour references the two trains, which display an orange and red coating. As mentioned earlier, companies began using flashy colours for the coat of their train sets throughout dieselisation for the public to associate them with power and swiftness.

The poster displays two types of streamliners designed by the Milwaukee Road. On the left, a rather “classic”, regular diesel design similar to ones which were created at the time, and on the right, a comparatively futuristic-looking one.

Precisely, the one on the left was and is still well-known for its “skytop lounge” cars. The dome-inspired-shaped car and the series of windows truly testifies to the attempt from the railroad industry to modernise their image. If train traveling had always been promoting the marvellous panoramas passengers could admire, designers specifically emphasised such asset by creating these cars. From them, passengers could fully admire the magnificent landscapes standing before them, as illustrated in the ad. This series of Olympian Hiawathas is still thought to be the most distinctive railroad cars ever created. Aside from its unusual shape and as implied by their name, the skytop lounge cars were both lounge and dining cars, with luxurious, refined furniture. Consequently, the Milwaukee Road company not only brought new, modern elements

to their material but also revised and bet on the assets rail traveling always stood for, playing with both tradition and modernity.

Such train designs helped the public, in William L. Withuhn words, “rightly associated diesels with state-of-the-art passenger service.”³⁶

Yet, despite such creativity, dieselisation did not prevent a shift in public opinion towards the railroad throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Companies, indeed, failed at “modernising” the railroad in the eyes of the public. Railroad traffic continued to seriously decline in the 1950s, with companies reducing their passenger and freight services drastically. Other modes of transportation proved too attractive: the convenience of the automobile and the truck; the cheapness of the bus; and the speed of the airplane had won over rail traffic.

Such circumstances took a serious toll on public opinion towards the railroad industry in the 1960s. Starting from the 1950s, the general opinion grew rather hostile and critical towards the railroad. Contrary to previous generations, the appeal of rail travelling had significantly dropped. Precisely, the industry was in the great majority still perceived as the overpowering monopoly it stood as in the 19th century. Yet, the American population held the belief that railroads were still to be treated as a monopoly, i.e., that it did not need support and interests from the public to simply exist. A general feeling which led railroads to be both abandoned by the population and government. To quote Stover’s words:

The public sees the railroads as old-fashioned, as the original pioneers of pork-barrelling back in the land-grant days, and as common carriers who hate passengers. Completely enchanted by the jet age of air travel, the typical American forgets the almost complete Dieselization of the rail network and seems to believe that railroading still has a Vanderbilt at the throttle of a wood-burning, American-type locomotive.³⁷

Moreover, since the budget of railroad companies for advertising had drastically shrunk because the population favoured the automobile and the plane, the average American had few first-hand information on the railroad industry.

³⁶ Withuhn, William L. *Rails across America: A History of Railroads in North America*. Smithmark Publishers, 1993. p.142

³⁷ Stover, John F. *American Railroads*. Univ. of Chicago Press, 1961. p. 251

Conclusion

No matter how complex the creation and development of the railroad network in the United States was, such complexity was to be reflected in the ways it was represented in railroad advertising and perceived by the American population. Over almost a century, railroad advertising attempted to control the general perception of a revolutionary means of transportation, which on many occasions proved to be challenging, and close to indomitable in critical times. This mostly through idealistic representations of the railroad industry, which would vary according to the historical era. It is by understanding the motives behind such choices of representation in railroad advertising that the tensions that arose from the development of the railroad in American society are brought forward. With what seems at first to be mere advertising, reveals the shaping of a relationship and culture between a new means of transport and a civilisation.

Starting from its early success in the 1870s, the railroad presented itself as a groundbreaking way of travelling, surpassing prior modes of transportation, challenging natural obstacles, which would dictate the future western expansion of the whole country. If it was first welcomed positively by the public, but poor handling of its development and corruption led to a wave of scepticism among the American population. A period that marked the start of a pattern that would repeat itself in railroad history.

During its “Golden Age” from the 1880s to the early 1910s, through advertising, railroad companies worked intensively for the locomotive to be nationally deemed a symbol of technological innovation, progress, and prosperity. Yet, in line with the Gilded Age, if the unprecedented wave of industrialisation gave a new momentum to the railroad industry, the monopolistic practices and corruption at its core further fuelled the distrust parts of the American population had developed towards them in the decades prior. Such elements did not prevent the shaping of a culture around railroads, which became symbols of faultless timekeeping and earned the reputation of perpetual good providers. If the population disagreed with some of their practices, railroads nevertheless set the standard in many aspects of American lives.

Finally, from the mid-1910s to the 1960s, the railroad industry underwent an identity crisis living up to the unparalleled obstacles it faced. From having to serve the country during the two World Wars, to keeping up with new attractive transport facilities, to totally renewing their image as a last attempt to survive, the railroad was on the edge of collapsing, specifically passenger service.

Precisely, the 1970s marked a new birth for passenger service in American railroad history. In answer to the decline in passenger trains, the Rail Passenger Service Act was passed by Congress in 1970, marking the creation of the National Railroad Passenger Corporation, which was shortly named “Amtrak”. Amtrak was declared in charge of intercity passenger rail services, which were previously operated by private companies, and began service on May 1st, 1971. As stated in one of their slogans, ever since its creation the goal of Amtrak has been to “*mak[e] the trains worth traveling again*”. Nowadays, the revival of rail services remains a priority in American policies, with the recent example being President Joe Biden passing the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act in 2021, an act aiming at upgrading the national infrastructure, including passenger rail, notably to address climate change.

A fact which leads us to the second part of this essay, where global transport patterns and their environmental impact will be tackled by exploring how the link between climate change and transport habits is dealt with through French secondary school programmes and whether awareness is being raised among students.

PROLONGEMENTS DIDACTIQUES

SENSIBILISER LES ELEVES A L'IMPACT ENVIRONNEMENTAL DES TRANSPORTS EN COURS D'ANGLAIS



Introduction

Quel est donc le lien entre le rail et la pédagogie ? S'intéresser aux habitudes de transport d'un pays revient à s'intéresser à son histoire, sa géographie, sa sociologie. Il s'agit alors de s'exposer à des siècles de décisions politiques et démocratiques, à des modes de vie différents des siens et de l'impact actuel qu'ils ont sur nos sociétés. Parmi les plus étudiés ces dernières décennies, les impacts environnementaux occupent aujourd'hui une place primordiale au sein des politiques des transports.

Ce sont ces préoccupations environnementales liées aux transports qui ont motivé l'écriture de l'aspect didactique de ce mémoire. Plus précisément car ceux-ci sont légitimes de s'inscrire dans le « parcours citoyen » que les élèves se doivent d'effectuer lors de leurs années d'enseignement secondaire. Tel que décrit par le Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale : « le parcours citoyen s'adresse à des citoyens en devenir qui prennent conscience de leurs droits, de leurs devoirs, de leurs responsabilités » et vise à « la transmission des valeurs et principes de la République en abordant les grands champs de l'éducation à la citoyenneté ». Ce parcours s'effectue à travers toutes les matières, dont l'anglais. Parmi ces valeurs s'inscrivent « l'éducation à l'environnement et au développement durable »³⁸, dans lesquelles les habitudes de transport est un thème à aborder de manière privilégiée. De plus dans la langue universelle que représente l'anglais, qui permettra donc aux élèves de développer les outils nécessaires pour appréhender pleinement les débats environnementaux à échelle globale, mais également à exprimer leurs potentielles revendications en tant que jeunes citoyens concernés.

Si le train représente aujourd'hui une alternative durable à la problématique des transports, cette partie didactique ne se limitera pas à celui-ci, mais traitera également des autres moyens de locomotions qui s'inscrivent dans cette réflexion environnementale.

C'est dans ce contexte qu'évolue la problématique de cette partie didactique : Sensibiliser les élèves aux impacts environnementaux des transports en cours d'anglais.

³⁸ (<https://www.education.gouv.fr/le-parcours-citoyen-5993>, dernièrement consulté le 17 septembre 2023)

Dans un premier temps, un lien sera établi entre ces questions environnementales liées aux transports et les pratiques en classe, puis dans un second temps, sera proposé un exemple d'exploitation en classe.

I. Lien entre le sujet et des pratiques de classe

Afin d'établir un lien entre le sujet et les pratiques de classe, il semble primordial de s'intéresser à ce qui a déjà été mis en place concernant la mobilité durable au sein des cours d'anglais. C'est donc dans cette visée qu'a été créé un questionnaire afin d'enrichir ce mémoire. Celui-ci s'intitule : « Sensibiliser les élèves à l'impact environnemental des transports en cours d'anglais » et est à destination de professeurs d'anglais du secondaire. Comme mentionné plus tôt, tout professeur, quelle que soit la matière qu'il enseigne, a pour but de sensibiliser les élèves à une diversité de sujets afin qu'ils acquièrent une conscience citoyenne. Le réchauffement climatique et nos habitudes de consommation en faisant partie intégrante. C'est à partir du souci de contribuer au parcours citoyen de l'élève que s'est construit ce questionnaire. Son but étant de définir si, ces dernières années, les élèves ont été sensibilisés aux conséquences environnementales liées aux transports en cours d'anglais, et si oui, sous quels angles.

Concernant son contenu, le questionnaire est composé de 13 questions sous formes de cases à cocher ou de réponses « libres » où les participants peuvent rédiger leurs réponses. Les réponses ont été collectées de manière anonyme.

Par souci d'intégrer un large panel d'expériences, une diversité de réponses a été pensée et proposée aux participants. Ainsi, ce questionnaire s'intéresse autant aux professeurs ayant abordé le sujet que ceux ne l'ayant pas. Le but n'étant pas de porter un jugement sur la sensibilité et l'expérience de chacun dans la construction de ses cours.

Il est également bon de noter que les transports cités ont été le moins possible décrits sous les étiquettes « verts », « doux » et « durables », étant donné que celles-ci pourraient être discutées ou interprétées de façons diverses. C'est pour cette raison que leur nomination, notamment dans la quatrième question, est restée neutre.

APERÇU DU QUESTIONNAIRE



Sensibiliser les élèves à l'impact environnemental des transports en cours d'anglais...

13 questions à l'attention de professeur.e.s d'anglais du secondaire dans le cadre d'un mémoire MEEF. Les réponses demeurent anonymes.

Merci à tous ceux et celles qui prendront le temps d'y répondre ! Que vous ayez abordé le sujet ou non, votre expérience est précieuse.

Anaïs, étudiante-stagiaire en M2 MEEF Anglais

anaiskourteli@gmail.com [Changer de compte](#)



 Non partagé

* Indique une question obligatoire

Avez-vous déjà abordé l'impact et le rôle des transports dans une démarche écologique avec vos élèves ? *

- Oui
- Non

Si non, pensez-vous qu'il est important d'échanger avec vos élèves sur le sujet ?

- Oui, cela me semble être un sujet important à traiter
- Non, cela me paraît secondaire

Si non, pensez-vous que ceci est dû à un manque de ressources pédagogiques sur le sujet ? (dans les manuels, en ligne)

- Oui
- Non
- Je ne sais pas

Si oui, quel(s) moyen(s) de transport avez-vous abordé(s) ?

- Le train
- Le bus
- Le métro
- La voiture
- Les camions
- Les motos, scooters
- Le vélo
- L'avion
- Le bateau
- Autre : _____

Sous quel angle l'avez-vous étudié ? (données sur l'impact environnemental des transports, projets politiques/citoyens visant à réduire la pollution, ONG/mouvements/associations écologistes promouvant l'adoption de moyens de transport plus doux ?)

Votre réponse _____

Avez-vous effectué des "études de cas" de villes, pays ?

- Oui
- Non

Si oui, ces études de cas portaient sur...

- des pays anglophones
- des pays non-anglophones

Auriez-vous des exemples de pays / villes que vous avez abordé(e)s ?

Votre réponse _____

Quels sont les types de support qui vous ont permis d'illustrer le sujet ?

- Textuels (articles de presse, communiqués)
- Iconographiques (affiches, photographies, oeuvres artistiques)
- Vidéos
- Audios
- Autre : _____

Avec quelle(s) classe(s) / niveau(x) l'avez-vous abordé ?

- Terminale
- Première
- Seconde
- 3ème
- 4ème
- 5ème
- 6ème

Combien de temps avez-vous consacré à cette thématique ?

- Une séance
- Plusieurs séances
- Une séquence

Avez-vous organisé des activités d'expression autour du sujet ?

Non

Oui, écrites

Oui, orales / de prise de parole en continu (débats, exprimer son opinion individuellement)

Autre : _____

Lors de l'abord du sujet, les élèves vous ont-ils paru intéressés / concernés ?

Tout à fait

Plus ou moins

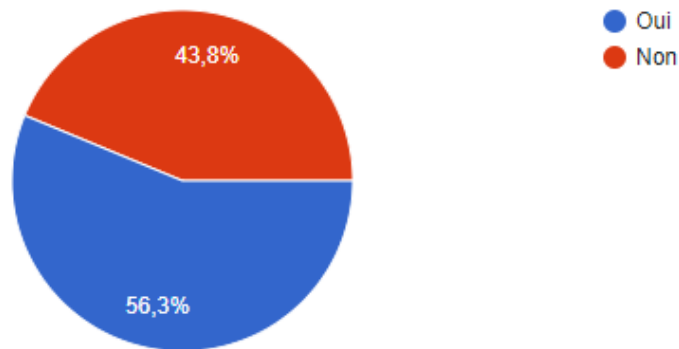
Pas du tout

Le questionnaire a été diffusé de mars 2022 jusqu'en octobre 2023 via courriels, mais également en main propre sous forme d'affiches dans divers établissements scolaires. Il a été choisi d'intégrer un QR code à celles-ci afin de faciliter l'accès au questionnaire. Deux versions d'affiches ont été créés au fil de leur diffusion :

Observation n°1 : L'impact environnemental des transports est en majorité un sujet abordé par les professeurs d'anglais du secondaire.

Avez-vous déjà abordé l'impact et le rôle des transports dans une démarche écologique avec vos élèves ?

16 réponses

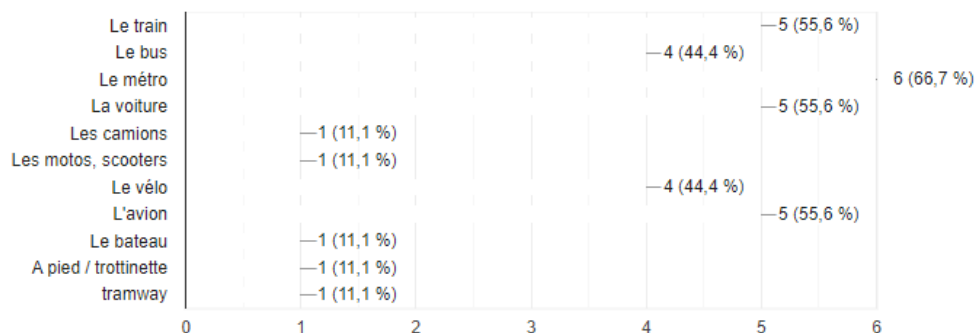


Sur 16 réponses, 9 professeurs ont fait part du fait qu'ils abordaient les transports dans une démarche écologique avec leurs élèves. Cela pourrait témoigner du fait que le thème de l'écologie occupe une place de plus en plus importante dans les programmes du secondaire, dans l'optique de sensibiliser les élèves au changement climatique en tant que futur citoyen.

Observation n°2 : Les transports en commun sont davantage étudiés.

Si oui, quel(s) moyen(s) de transport avez-vous abordé(s) ?

9 réponses



Nous nous intéresserons aux moyens de transports qui ont été le plus étudiés. La première observation est la suivante : lors de la création de séances / séquences à ce sujet, l'emphase est

mise sur les transports en commun, tel le train, le bus et le métro. À noter que le métro arrive en tête des résultats : ceci pourrait être en partie expliqué par le symbolisme du métro londonien (The « London Underground ») lors de séquences traitant de l'Angleterre.

Ce qui s'avère tout aussi intéressant est la fréquence à laquelle la voiture est abordée : elle est presque autant mentionnée que certains transports publics. Nous pourrions donc en conclure qu'elle est souvent comparée, mise en parallèle avec les transports en commun, étant donné sa forte influence dans les habitudes de mobilité à l'échelle planétaire.

Enfin, le vélo qui est un transport individuel et le symbole de la mobilité verte, est lui aussi tout autant étudié.

Observation n°3 : Les angles d'approche sont variés.

Sous quel angle l'avez-vous étudié ? (données sur l'impact environnemental des transports, projets politiques/citoyens visant à réduire la pollution, ONG/mouvements/associations écologistes promouvant l'adoption de moyens de transport plus doux ?)

9 réponses

Dans le cadre de la semaine 'European Mobility Week' en septembre

Impact environnemental des transports

Nous avons abordé l'impact négatif du changement climatique sur la faune sauvage (doc iconographique, texte) puis essayé d'envisager des changements de vie quotidienne qui pourraient avoir un impact positif sur la planète

ONG ecole

citoyens visant à réduire la pollution, associations écologistes promouvant l'adoption de moyens de transports plus doux

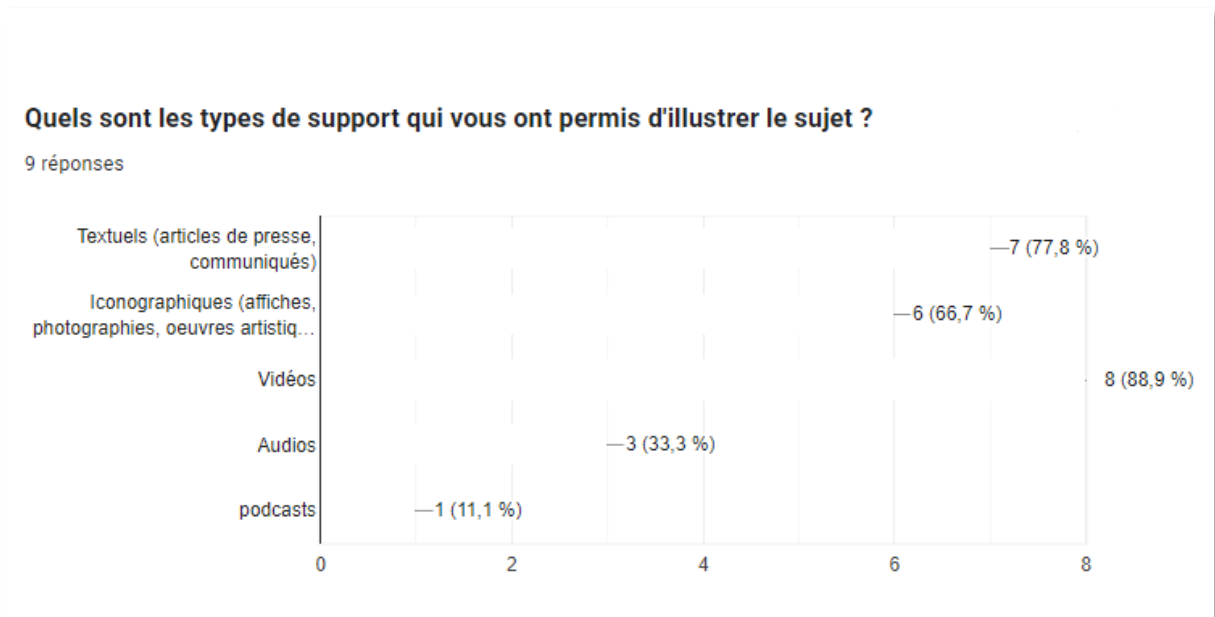
"flight shame" + "consumerism"

projets citoyens en anglais: volunteering in a national park in the US

Impact du tourisme de masse sur des destinations précises et au niveau mondial.

Le thème de l'impact environnemental des transports semble offrir aux enseignants une multitude de ressources sur lesquelles ils peuvent s'appuyer. Parmi les réponses collectées nous relevons : l'analyse de données portant sur la pollution générée par les transports ; la naissance de nouveaux phénomènes et comportements sociaux liés à la mobilité durable ; l'étude de projets citoyens à échelle locale/continentale/mondiale et l'analyse de messages véhiculés par des organisations non-gouvernementales environnementalistes.

Observation n°4 : La vidéo, le texte et l'image demeurent des supports pédagogiques privilégiés.



La vidéo arrive en tête des résultats collectés, ceci pourrait être justifié par le fait qu'elle combine à la fois des images, du son et de l'information. Ceci pourrait être expliqué par le fait que la vidéo est un outil privilégié en cours de langues car elle permet aux élèves de s'immerger plus facilement dans le contexte / la situation présenté(e).

On note également que les documents textuels possèdent une place importante dans l'abord de ce thème. Nous pouvons supposer que ceux-ci permettraient aux élèves de mieux mobiliser les termes et lexiques spécifiques liés à l'écologie et aux transports afin qu'ils puissent les transférer dans le cadre d'autres tâches.

Enfin, les documents iconographiques permettent également d'amorcer le sujet, et ceux-ci pourraient correspondre aux messages d'associations ou organisations non-gouvernementales environnementalistes. À travers ces supports, les élèves sont initiés à la réception de messages visuels et du contenu politique qu'ils peuvent potentiellement véhiculer.

Observation n°5 : L'impact environnemental lié aux transports peut être presque abordé à tous les niveaux, du collège au lycée.

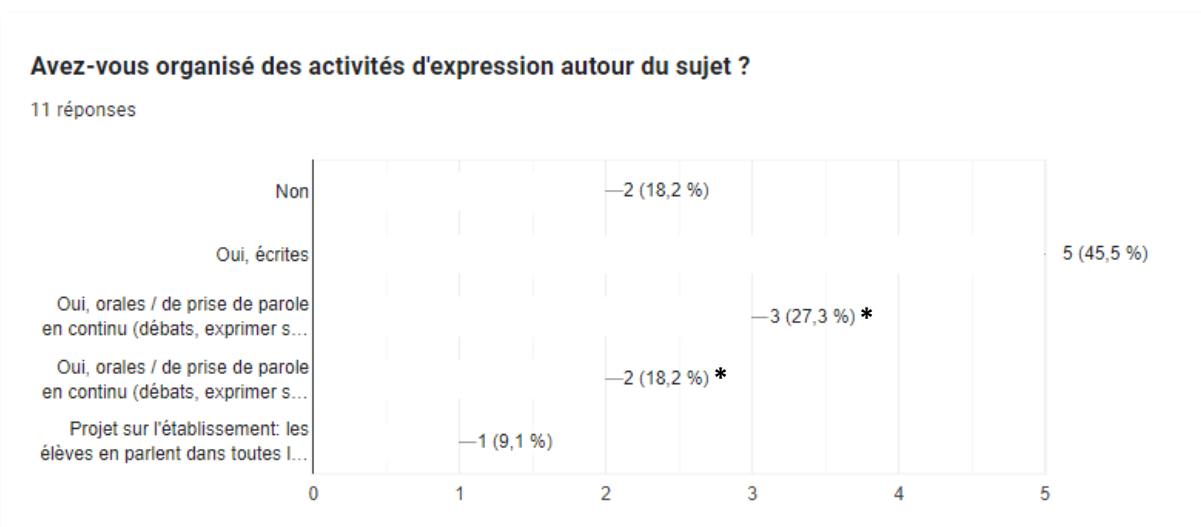
Avec quelle(s) classe(s) / niveau(x) l'avez-vous abordé ?

10 réponses



Selon les résultats obtenus, ce thème semble être accessible à plusieurs niveaux, qu'il s'agisse de classes de collège ou de lycée. Néanmoins, on notera que cette notion semble être davantage abordée en fin de cycle en ce qui concerne le collège. Concernant les programmes du lycée, le thème peut être traité à tous niveaux, de la Seconde à la Terminale.

Observation n°6 : Les élèves s'expriment autant à l'écrit qu'à l'oral sur le sujet.



Comme exprimé par les résultats, l'expression écrite semble être favorisée par les professeurs lors de tâches finales ou intermédiaire, de même pour les activités orales qui arrivent ex aequo. Il faut également mentionner la mise en place d'un projet dans l'établissement par un(e) professeur(e) ayant participé au questionnaire (« Projet sur l'établissement : les élèves en parlent dans toutes les classes »). Le sujet permettrait donc de donner lieu à des campagnes de sensibilisation sur le thème de l'écologie entre élèves. Une action qui entre directement en lien avec le parcours citoyen effectué par les élèves tout au long de leur scolarité.

Observation n°7 : Les élèves se sentent en majorité concernés par le sujet.



* Les deux réponses sont à combiner et représentent donc 5 réponses sur 16. Elles ont été dédoublées à la suite d'un problème informatique.

Si notre analyse s'est davantage concentrée sur les pratiques enseignantes, il est également primordial de s'intéresser à l'intérêt que les élèves portent envers ce thème. D'après les réponses collectées, les professeurs ont en majorité fait part que leurs élèves ont exprimé un intérêt plus ou moins important envers le sujet. Une autre partie témoigne d'un public d'élèves se sentant plus particulièrement concernés par cette cause. Aucun désintérêt visible de la part de ceux-ci n'a été exprimé.

II. Suggestion d'exploitation en classe

Après avoir été exposé à toutes ces données, nous pourrions nous poser la question suivante : Comment concrètement exploiter ce sujet en classe ? Comme piste d'exploitation, nous proposerons la mise en place d'une séance.

Notre séance s'intitulera : « Travel Smart, Travel Green » et sera à destination d'une classe de Terminale spécialité Anglais Monde Contemporain, dont le niveau visé en anglais est C1.

Elle s'inscrira dans l'axe « Sauver la planète, penser les futures possibles » faisant partie du programme au lycée.

La séance se situera en début d'une séquence fictive traitant de l'impact environnemental des transports et plus précisément de la mobilité durable qui en découle. La séquence s'intitulera « Green Mobility for a Greener World ».

La tâche finale de notre séquence fictive sera la suivante :

You are a climate activist for a non-governmental organisation. For Earth Day on April 22nd, you were asked to create a poster promoting environment-friendly means of transport. Pick the one that matters the most to you!

Your posters will then be displayed in the English classroom.

Reminder: To be effective, your poster must include convincing arguments, catch phrases, and nice illustrations!

Dans le cadre de cette séquence, notre séance comportera plusieurs objectifs.

D'un point de vue culturel, elle traitera de la mobilité durable dans le monde et des actions mises en œuvre pour encourager celle-ci, notamment à travers des campagnes de sensibilisation de la part d'organisations non-gouvernementales. Ceci permettra également d'étudier leur rôle dans les questions environnementales actuelles.

Concernant les objectifs linguistiques à atteindre, notre séance permettra de faire travailler aux élèves le lexique lié à l'écologie et de la mobilité durable (Ex : traffic, pollution, green mobility, carbon dioxide, etc.), ainsi que le lexique lié au militantisme (Ex : activism, awareness campaign, to fight for something, to stand up for something, to change the world, etc.). En matière d'objectifs grammaticaux, cette séance permettra d'effectuer un rebrassage des comparatifs « less » et « more » (Ex: The activists think there should be less more trains and less planes.) et du superlatif « most » (Ex : The most reasonable means of transport is...), mais aussi de mobiliser le modal de la volonté will/would (Ex: In the future, we will have to use public transit more often), le modal du conseil should (Ex: I think we should use public transit

more), et de la possibilité can/could (Ex: We could limit CO2 emissions by driving less.); et enfin, de manipuler la structure de l'irréel et l'hypothèse If + prétérit ainsi que la concordance des temps qui en découle. (Ex: If people drove less, the planet would be less polluted.) L'objectif phonologique sera de travailler la prononciation des mots finissant en -ion, et donc le fait qu'ils seront accentués sur l'avant-dernière syllabe. (Ex : emission, pollution, transportation, protestation, etc.)

Les activités langagières qui seront principalement travaillées seront l'expression orale en continu, la compréhension écrite et iconographique, et l'expression écrite.

Concernant les objectifs communicationnels, l'objectif sociolinguistique de cette séance sera d'employer un registre facilitant la transmission de messages citoyens. On attendra donc des élèves qu'ils aient recours à des structures idiomatiques synthétiques et emploient des termes clairs et précis. Les objectifs pragmatiques travaillés lors de cette séance seront le fait de savoir décrire et interpréter des documents iconographiques de différentes natures, tels des images et des graphiques.

Enfin, notre séance s'inscrit dans le parcours « Citoyen » car les élèves seront sensibilisés aux habitudes de transport et leur impact environnemental.

Dans un premier temps, la séance s'ouvrira sur une anticipation, composé de notre Document A, où les élèves seront exposés au thème global de la séquence : la mobilité durable. L'anticipation se basera sur une compréhension d'un document iconographique. Notre document s'agit d'une photographie prise lors d'une campagne de sensibilisation de l'organisation non-gouvernementale Greenpeace. Celle-ci a eu lieu en 2021 et portait sur la mobilité verte et le faible recours aux transports en commun d'un point de vue globale.

DOCUMENT A



Source: <https://www.greenpeace.org/> (2021)

Notre anticipation permettra de travailler une partie des objectifs de la séance.

Concernant les objectifs linguistiques, d'un point de vue lexical, seront travailler les champs lexicaux liés à la mobilité durable (Ex: pollution, means of transport, green mobility, carbon dioxide) ; et le militantisme (Ex : activism, awareness campaign, to fight for something, to stand up for something). En matière d'objectifs grammaticaux, l'anticipation permettra également aux élèves de manipuler le modal de la volonté will/would (Ex : If people would take the train more often...), le modal du conseil shall/ should (Ex: I think we should use public transit more.), le modal de la possibilité can/could (Ex: We could limit CO2 emissions by driving less.) ainsi que la structure de l'irréel et l'hypothèse If + prétérit et la concordance des temps qui en découle (If people drove less, the planet would be less polluted.) Un début de travail phonologique sera effectué sur la prononciation des mots finissant en -ion, et donc le fait qu'ils seront accentués sur l'avant-dernière syllable. (Ex : emission, pollution, protestation, etc.)

Concernant les activités langagières, le but de cette anticipation sera d'entraîner les élèves à l'expression orale en continu, du fait qu'ils devront réagir au document à l'oral et qu'ils mobiliseront le lexique nécessaire à la tâche finale.

En matière d'objectifs communicationnels, l'objectif sociolinguistique de cette séance sera d'employer un registre propre aux messages citoyens. Il sera donc attendu des élèves qu'ils aient recours à des structures idiomatiques synthétiques et emploient des termes clairs et précis qui participent à la clarté des messages en question. Les objectifs pragmatiques travaillés lors

de cette séance seront le fait de savoir décrire et interpréter des documents iconographiques de différentes nature, tels des images et des graphiques.

Afin de guider les élèves dans la compréhension du Document A, nous leur poserons les questions suivantes et des exemples de productions attendues de la part des élèves seront précisés sous forme de tableau :

Questions guidant la compréhension	Productions attendues des élèves
“Reactions ?”	Cette question étant la plus libre de l’activité, nous n’attendrons pas de productions précises de celles-ci.
“What strikes you?”	De même, cette question reste très ouverte du fait que l’on demande aux élèves de partir de l’élément qui les interpelle le plus. Voici quelques productions qui pourraient être attendues : “There is a colourful train and a plane in the background.” “Two people are standing, holding banners.” “There are two yellow banners stating....”
“What type of document is it?”	“It is a picture.”
“What can you see in the background?”	“We can see a train and a plane in the sky.”
“What about the two people in the foreground? What are they holding?”	“They are holding banners with slogans on them.”
“Who do you think they are?”	“They seem to be activists.”
“What can you say about the banners? In your own words, what do you understand from the slogans? What are the activists asking for?”	“The activists seem to be asking for more trains and less planes.”
“Can you guess why?”	De même ici on acceptera plusieurs hypothèses puis on recentrera le sujet au fil de la réflexion. “They could be asking for more trains because people travel by plane more.”

	<p>“They could be asking for more trains because planes pollute more.”</p> <p>“They could be asking for more trains because public transit is not as developed as air travel in most countries.”</p>
“Based on this context, what do you understand by “mobility”?”	“Mobility here could be referring to the ability/power to move freely.”
“Do you know what Greenpeace is? Have you ever heard about it?”	“Greenpeace is a(n) international/global non-governmental organisation (NGO) which spreads awareness on environmental issues.”
“Given what Greenpeace is and the word “mobility”, what kind of mobility are they asking for here? How would you define it? Can you give examples?”	“Greenpeace is asking for greener mobility, that is less polluting means of transport, such as trains, the bus, bikes, car sharing, etc..”
“So what do you think the Greenpeace activists were doing here?”	“They were holding an awareness campaign on airplane/aviation pollution and green mobility.”
“Do you think this is an important issue? Does it resonate with you? Why? Why not? What do you think?”	<p>Les élèves seront libres d’exprimer leurs avis et seront amenés à confronter leurs points de vue sur le sujet entre eux.</p> <p>Ce moment de réflexion serait le moment de réinvestir les structures de l’irréel et l’hypothèse (If), et les modaux will/would, can/could/ et should.</p> <p>“If people used public transport more, there would be less pollution, etc.”</p>

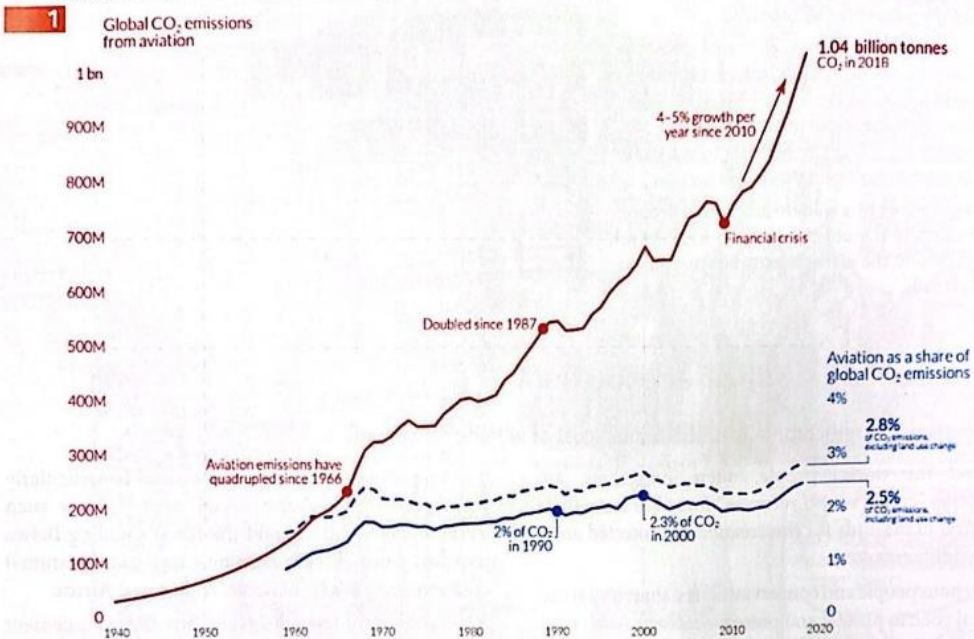
Après cette anticipation, nous utiliserons le Document B, qui est extrait d’une page du manuel *Let’s Meet Up!* Spécialité Anglais Monde Contemporain 1ère-Tle s’intitulant « Doing the Right Thing ». Nous baserons notre prochaine activité sur les exercices 1, 2 et 3 proposés par le manuel se nommant « Soaring CO2 emissions ».

Doing the right thing

A Soaring CO₂ emissions

Global carbon dioxide emissions from aviation

Aviation emissions includes passenger air travel, freight and military operations. It does not include non-CO₂ climate forcings, or a multiplier for warming effects at altitude.

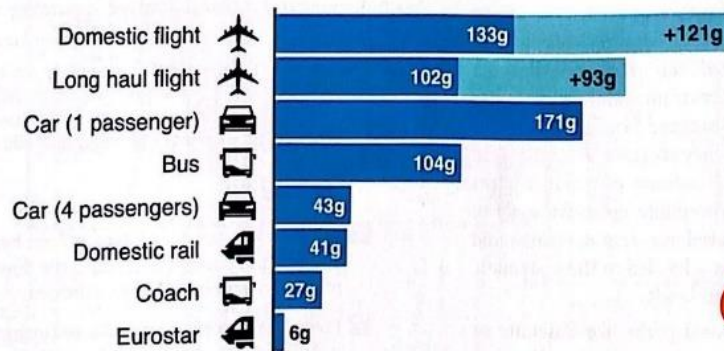


OurWorldInData.org - Research and data to make progress against the world's largest problems.
 Source: Lee et al. (2020). The contribution of global aviation to anthropogenic climate forcing for 2000 to 2018, based on Saunem and Schumann (2000) & IEA.
 Share of global emissions calculated based on total CO₂ data from the Global Carbon Project. Licensed under CC BY by the author Hannah Ritchie.

2 Emissions from different modes of transport

Emissions per passenger per km travelled

■ CO₂ emissions ■ Secondary effects from high altitude, non-CO₂ emissions



Note: Car refers to average diesel car

Source: BEIS/Defra Greenhouse Gas Conversion Factors 2019



- 1 Look at graph 1 and describe the recent trend in CO₂ emissions from aviation.
- 2 Look at document 2. Compare the emissions from different modes of transport. Determine the most reasonable mode of transport.
- 3 **CONNECT.** Look at both graphs and explain why flying is criticised.

(Source: Séquence "Megacities a threat to sustainability" provenant du manuel *Let's Meet Up!*

Spécialité Anglais Monde Contemporain 1ère-Tle année 2021)

Les consignes ont été réécrites pour davantage de lisibilité :

1. Look at graph 1 and describe the recent trend in CO2 emissions from aviation.
2. Look at Document 2. Compare the emissions from different modes of transport. Determine the most reasonable mode of transport.
3. Connect. Look at both graphs and explain why flying is criticised.

Le Document B nous servira à travailler plusieurs objectifs.

Concernant les objectifs linguistiques et plus précisément les apports lexicaux, le Document B permettra de mettre davantage l'accent sur le champ lexical lié à la mobilité durable (Ex: air travel, means of transport, pollution, green mobility, carbon dioxide). D'un point de vue grammatical, ces exercices permettront de rebrasser les comparatifs « less » et « more » (Ex : Aviation pollutes more than domestic rail), et le superlatif « most » (Ex : Rail seems to be the most reasonable means of transport.) L'on travaillera à nouveau la prononciation des mots finissant en -ion, et donc le fait qu'ils seront accentués sur l'avant-dernière syllable. (Ex : emission, pollution, protestation, etc.)

Les activités langagières principalement travaillées lors de cette activité seront l'expression orale en continu et l'expression écrite.

En matière d'objectifs communicationnels, d'un point de vue sociolinguistique, les élèves devront avoir recours à un anglais synthétique et employer des termes clairs et précis. De manière pragmatique, les élèves devront savoir décrire et interpréter des documents iconographiques tels des graphiques et en tirer des observations.

Concernant le déroulé de cette activité, l'on portera d'abord attention à l'intitulé des deux graphiques, celui du Document A.1 « Global carbon dioxide emissions from aviation » et A.2 « Emissions from different modes of transport ». Le but sera de faire un point sur la signification des mots : « emissions » et « carbon dioxide » et s'assurer que chaque élève comprenne à quoi ils font référence ici. Les consignes des deux premiers exercices seront lues à l'oral et les élèves seront libres de poser des questions si l'une d'entre elles ne leur semble pas claire.

Ensuite, les élèves seront amenés à se mettre en binômes pour répondre aux deux premières questions. Un temps sera laissé pour qu'ils puissent s'appropriier les deux documents et échanger sur les questions. Une mise en commun et correction seront ensuite faites à l'oral.

Enfin, la consigne du troisième exercice sera lue en commun et sera à effectuer en binômes, mais cette fois-ci à l'écrit. Un temps sera laissé aux élèves pour qu'ils échangent entre eux et

rédigent leurs réponses. Une mise en commun sera ensuite faite à l'oral, où les élèves liront leurs réponses.

Une trace en fin d'heure sera ensuite effectuée, où les éléments de réponse des élèves y seront inclus.

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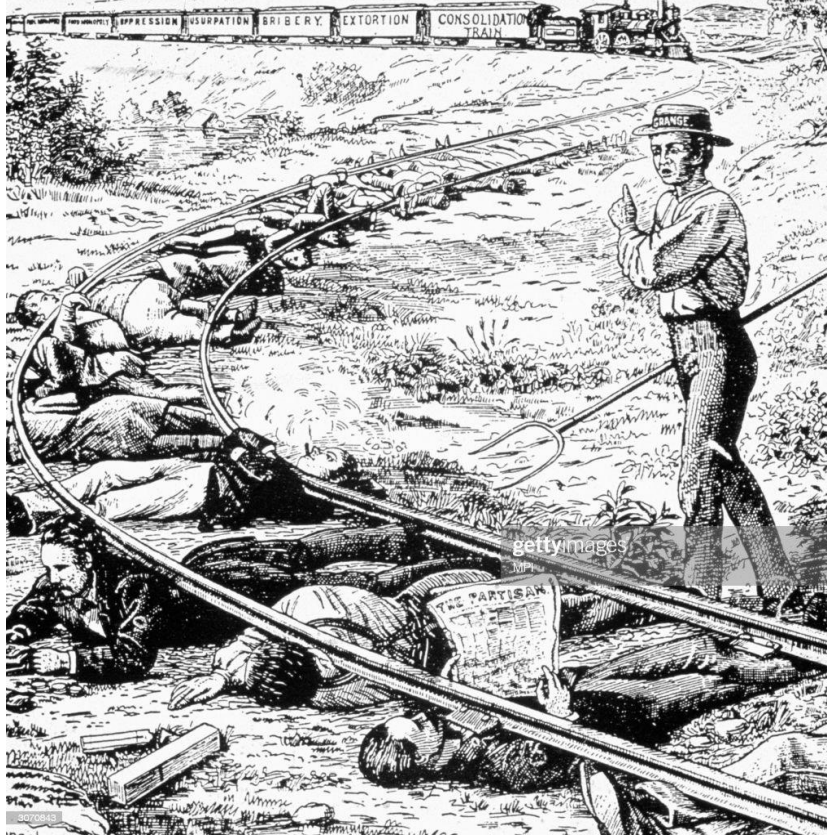
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APPENDIX

Appendix A

For illustrative purposes of the anti-railroad feelings during the 1870s and the grievances of the Granger Movement.

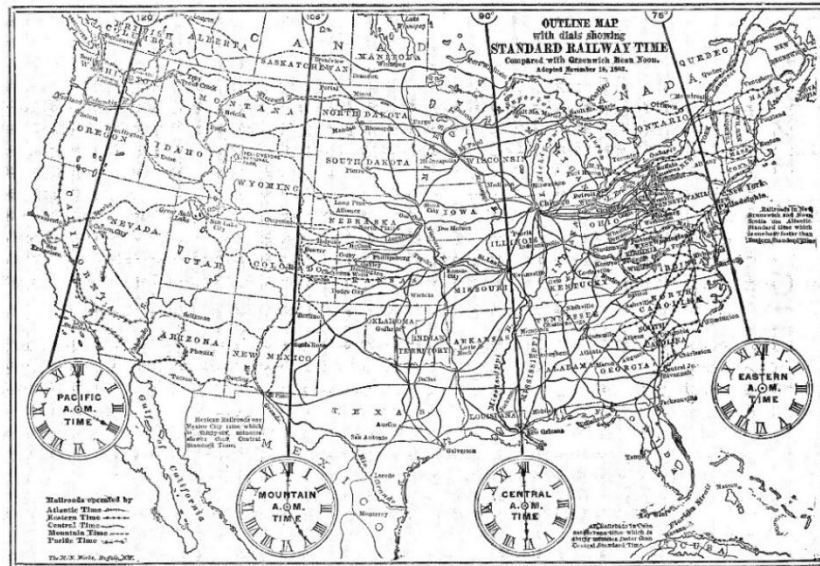


The Grange Awakening the Sleepers (1870), cartoon, unknown artist

A cartoon representing people sleeping under railroad lines while a farmer tries to warn them of an approaching train which cars are labelled: “CONSOLIDATION-TRAIN”, “EXTORTION” and “BRIBERY”.

Appendix B

For clearer representation of the introduction of time zones in the U.S. after the adoption of Standard Time on November 18th, 1883.



Map of the new time zones after the adoption of Standard Time (1883). The Standard Time map used to be featured in the *Travelers' Official Guide*.



A map by the Chicago & Alton Railroad, introducing the new time zones (1883)

Appendix C



The Art of Railroad Advertising (Withuhn, William L. *Rails across America: A History of Railroads in North America*. Smithmark Publishers, 1993. p. 116-117)

To quote William L. Withuhn: “To this day, railroad emblems are some of the most identifiable items in the history of advertising.” (p. 116)