

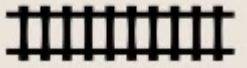
A Power in the Land: The First Transcontinental Railroad and the Second American System

Drew Baird

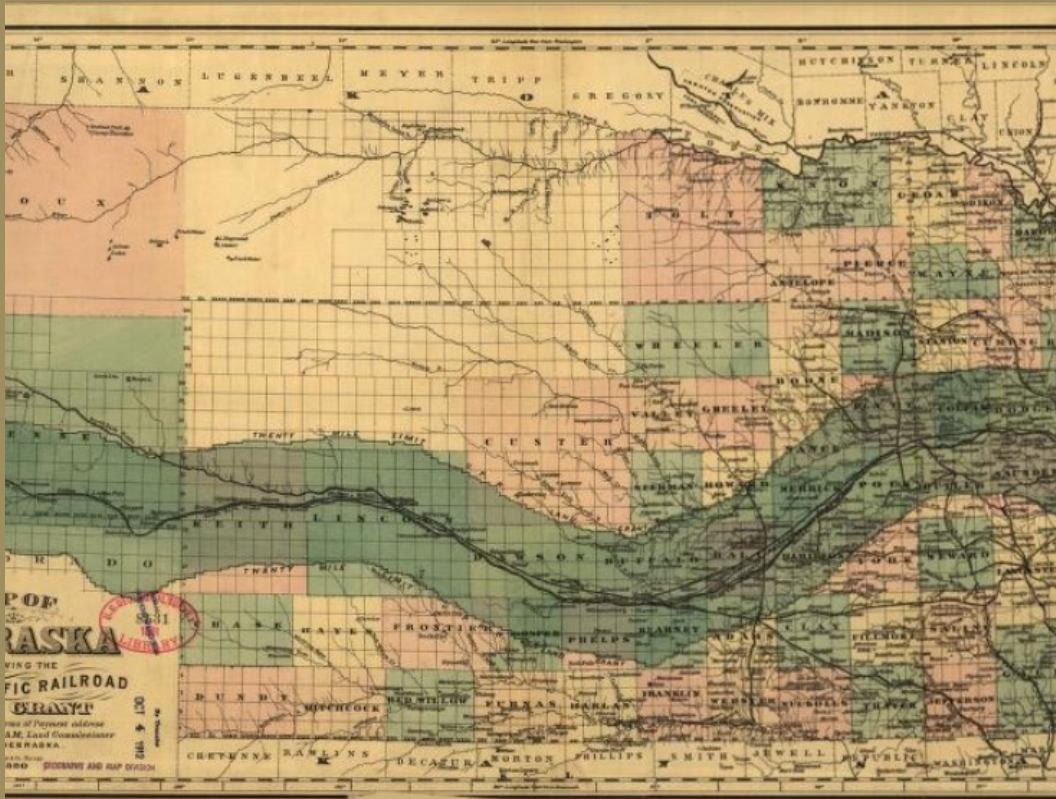
History '24

Advised by: Dr. Roche





Central Ideas



- Railroad men built the first transcontinental railroad by **redefining political relationships** between the state and private corporations
- A new **"American system"**
 - public and private
 - westward expansion

Historiography

- Engaging with scholars that study the railroad, political economy, state power, public lands, etc.
 - Richard White
 - Manu Karuka
 - William Cronon
- **"Second American System"** as a synthesis of several historians' approaches...
- Primary sources show this political system at the ground-level
 - personal accounts
 - railway papers
 - government testimony



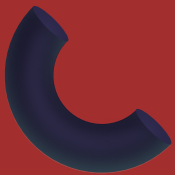
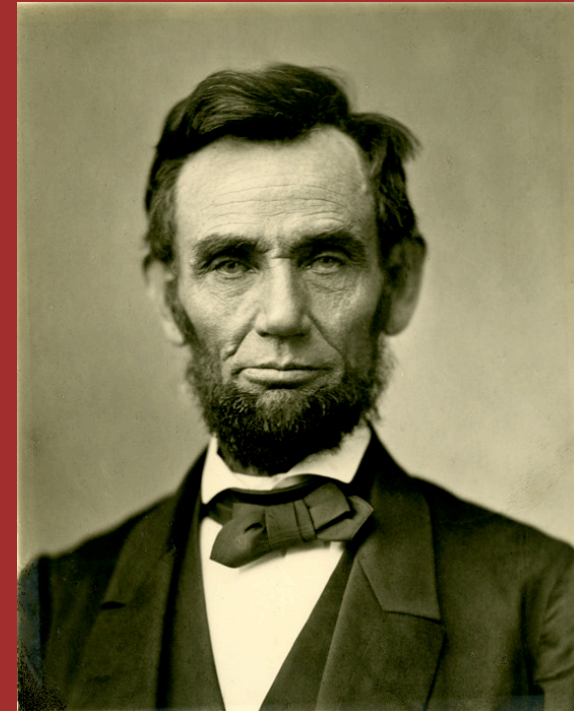
Railroad Men



- Financiers, engineers, surveyors, as well as politicians and generals
- Thomas Durant of the Union Pacific and Collis Huntington of the Central Pacific
- Little experience; wanted high reward, low risk; lobbied and cheated for government bonds, land grants
- "Friendships" between public officials and railroad financiers

Republican Dreams

- Free labor and free land
- "Reconstruction" in the South *and* West
- A transcontinental railroad as a tool for western development
- Republicans were willing to give railroad men what they wanted: government money

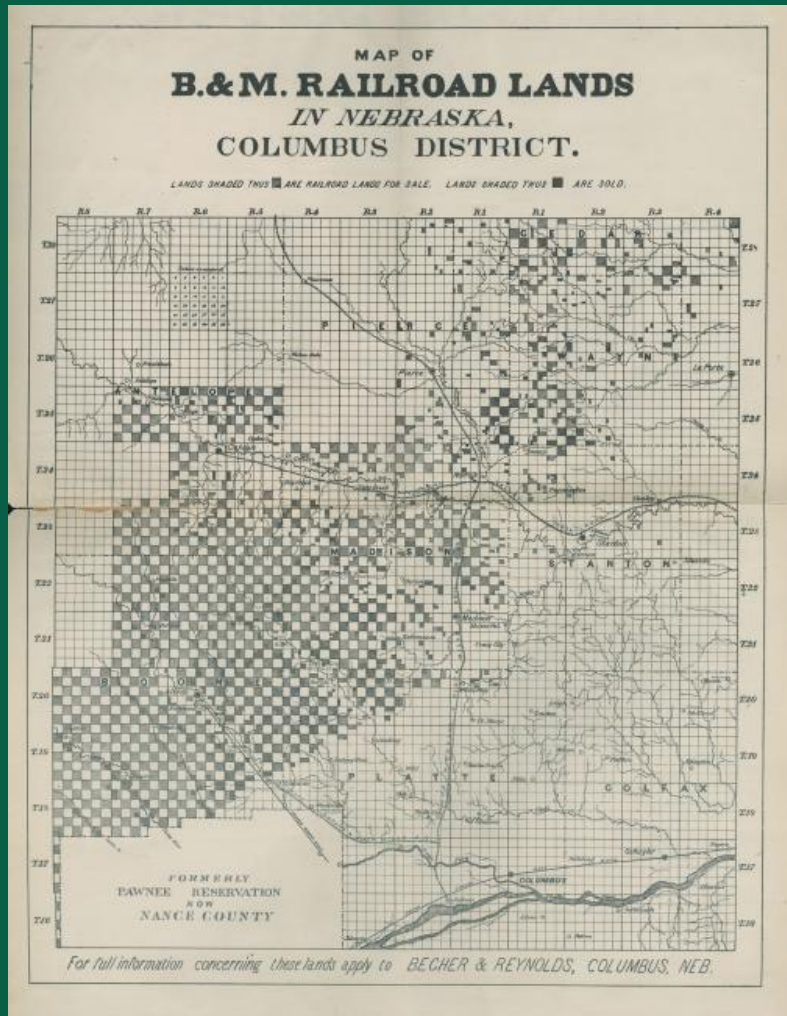


A New Politics of Space and Scale

- A monumental project
 - 2,000 miles across the interior
 - 15,000 workers for Union Pacific & Central Pacific
 - 500 kegs of black powder used each day
- Initiated a new public-private relationship
 - massive federal aid
 - \$60 million in government bonds
 - 20 million acres of public lands



Railroad Colonialism



- A process the government started, but paid the railroads to finish...
 - public lands
 - Indigenous peoples
- 1) Federal land grants
- 2) Military occupation
- 3) Town development



Conclusions

- Consequences: political corruption, government finance beholden to corporations, environmental degradation
- Railroad men **shaped the nature of American westward expansion** and represented the growing overlap between government and business

