

### **Railroad Study Questions**

Below are two sets of questions that will help guide your reading of the two articles we will discuss in class on Tuesday, February 4th.

#### **QUESTION SET ONE – “James J. Hill and the Transcontinental Railroads”**

1. The government awarded subsidies to railroad builders based on how fast they worked and how much track they laid. Why did this incentive system end up producing badly run railroad lines that often went bankrupt?
2. Why was James Hill able to build a profitable railroad line without government subsidies? What did he do differently than the other railroad builders who took subsidies?
3. Why did Henry Villard fail to build a profitable railroad line?
4. How did James Hill insure ahead of time that once his railroad was built, there would be customers and goods to fill the trains?
5. Why did accepting government subsidies often interfere with railroad lines running efficiently and profitably?
6. Railroad owners asked for government subsidies in order to stimulate foreign trade. Hill refused subsidies but developed an extensive foreign trade with Asia. Why did he succeed in doing so? Why did his competitors fail?
7. What was Hill’s business model? How would you sum up his basic approach to building and running an efficient and profitable railroad?
8. How did government regulations (the Hepburn Act, the Sherman Anti-Trust Act) aimed at reforming poorly run railroads instead end up hurting Hill’s well-run railroad?

#### **QUESTION SET TWO – “Railroads and the Reorganization of Nature and Time”**

1. Unlike earlier transport systems (lakes, rivers, canals, mud roads), how were railroads “liberated” from the limits imposed by both geography and climate?

2. How did the railroads change people's perception of space and time? How did they decrease the cost of traveling long distances and increase the value of people's time?
3. How did the coming of the railroad change the process and scale of farming?
4. How did railroads change the ways in which travelers interacted with the surrounding environment?
5. How did the railroads literally come to dictate what time it was in any given location? Why did this happen?
6. Why did the railroads create a whole new class of professional workers (like accountants)?