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Review of *Historical Atlas of the North American
Railroad* by Derek Hayes

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Historical Atlas of the North American Railroad. By Derek Hayes. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010. 224 pp. Maps, illustrations, photographs, notes, bibliography, index. \$39.95 cloth.

Lavishly illustrated, beautifully bound, and richly textured, this volume stunningly reproduces the visual culture of the railroad: its maps, brochures, advertisements, broadsides, and pamphlets. Derek Hayes has brought together over 400 maps, ranging from the first railroad survey map drawn in the U.S., filed in 1809, to President Barack Obama's "Vision for High Speed Rail in America," published in 2009. This is an impressive compilation, but it is not an atlas in the conventional sense. Hayes considers a "map" to be any printed item with geographical information on it, whatever its genre. Whether a route map, advertisement, or ticket, whether railroad-produced or not, all are considered "maps" and treated without regard to their original purpose or format. For this atlas, moreover, Hayes has produced no new cartography, either representational or analytical.

Hayes has interwoven narrative text on the history of the railroad among the illustrations, and the volume suffers as a result, creating several problems. First, we learn nothing about the workers who built these colossal enterprises, or the tunneling, bridging, and grading operations they undertook. Second, older myths are perpetuated here. The most obvious example is Hayes's dismissive depiction of the Grangers as cranky obstacles to progress. His treatment of land grants is equally neorevisionist. Hayes suggests correctly that the railroads received less-sizable grants than were often depicted in some hyperbolic maps. But his conclusion, left there, misleads: after all, the federal land grant to the Union Pacific Railroad roughly equaled the square mileage of New Jersey and New Hampshire combined; the Central Pacific got, in effect, Maryland. Native American losses to the railroads go entirely unmentioned.

Third, Hayes's narrative is unapologetically triumphant and

uncritical, as well as out of touch with the latest scholarship on the railroads in North American history by Richard White, Richard Orsi, Teresa Van Hoy, T. J. Stiles, and Theresa Case. In fact, this atlas leaves out much of North America—neither Mexico nor Central America is included, though Canada is. Hayes downplays the *Crédit Mobilier* fraud, for example, by explaining simply that the company “took advantage of new limited-liability legislation.” The explanation, not entirely accurate, gives the *Crédit Mobilier*’s activities a veneer of legitimacy and respectability they do not deserve.

For Great Plains scholars, this volume will likely both inspire and disappoint. The gorgeous maps, page after page, are mesmerizing, and even the most experienced railroad enthusiast will find new insights. But scholars will have trouble with the glorification and technological determinism at the heart of Hayes’s analysis, evident from the first paragraph according railroads singular responsibility for the growth of the U.S. and Canada.

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