



# Empire Express: Building the First Transcontinental Railroad

*David Haward Bain*

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". . . Work on as though Heaven were before you and Hell behind you." (From a letter written by Central Pacific's Collis P. Huntington to his partner, Leland Stanford, dated June 15, 1868 .)

It was the dawn of the Gilded Age; it welded the new western United States to the East with twin bands of iron; it opened a path for settlement and exploitation, utterly transforming the West as it sealed the doom of the Plains Indian culture; it was the culmination of the backbreaking work of more than twenty-five thousand laborers; it was, without a doubt, the century's second most transformative chain of events after the Civil War. *Empire Express* is the story of that gigantic enterprise to build a railroad from the Missouri to the Pacific, which culminated in the driving of the Golden Spike in the Utah desert in 1869 but ended in pervasive national scandals just four years later. It is also about the building of the enterprise known as the United States of America.

Spanning three dramatic decades, during which America effectively doubled in size, dreamed of glories upon the world's stage, fought three wars, and began to discover itself, *Empire Express* reads like a novel--colorful, lively, extremely dramatic--a page-turner, told from the points of view of participants. It draws on original sources as no previous chronicle has done--thousands of pages of handwritten letters, diaries, telegrams, and an array of biographical and historical works. *Empire Express* is also the first book to treat the building of the railroad in context, intrinsically connected to larger or distant events, part of a much larger, national picture viewed through a clear, discerning wide-angle lens.

As with the best of David McCullough's histories of the Brooklyn Bridge and the Panama Canal, Shelby Foote's *The Civil War* and Stephen Ambrose's *Undaunted Courage*, *Empire Express* offers a compelling, personality-filled story of one of America's most triumphant undertakings--history reading at its best.

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