Major Railroads in the United States, 1870–1890

Major Railroads in the United States, 1870
Major Railroads in the United States, 1870

• In partners:
  1. Analyze the maps in “Setting the Stage” on pages 466-67 in History Alive!
  2. Label as directed and answer questions on the back of your map in complete sentences.
1. The eastern end of the only train track across the United States in 1870 was a city in Nebraska (NE). Which city was that? Which city was at that track’s western end? Find both cities on your map and underline their names.
   - Eastern end: Omaha, Nebraska
   - Western end: Sacramento, California

2. According to the population density maps in your book, how did settlement around Omaha, Nebraska, change between 1870 and 1890?
   - Population density around Omaha rose from 2–45 people per square mile in 1870 to 18–45 people per square mile in 1890.

3. The builders of the first transcontinental railroad began at each end of the route and worked toward the middle. The two tracks met at the Great Salt Lake. Circle where they met on your map. In which present-day state is their connecting point located?
   - The connecting point is located in Utah.
4. The railroad map in your book shows that by 1890, two more transcontinental railroads connected Seattle and Lake Superior. Draw those two railroad lines. Through which two towns did the southern route between Seattle and Lake Superior pass? Through which present-day states did both lines pass?
   - The southern route passed through Butte and Fargo. Both lines passed through the present day states of Washington, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, and Minnesota.

5. By 1890, a railroad line connected Denver and Albuquerque to the first transcontinental railroad. Draw that railroad line. How did the population near Albuquerque change between 1870 and 1890? How did the population near Denver change?
   - The population near Albuquerque went from under 6 people per square mile in 1870 to 6–18 people per square mile in 1890.
   - The population around Denver jumped from under 6 people per square mile to 18–45 people per square mile.
6. Draw the line that by 1890 had extended the railroad from Iowa into what is now South Dakota. How did the population of eastern South Dakota change by 1890? How was settlement affected at the western end of this railroad line?
   • The population of eastern South Dakota went from under 6 people per square mile in 1870 to 6–45 people in 1890.
   • At the western end of this line, the population also increased to 6–18 people in 1890.

7. Draw the two railroad lines that connected New Orleans and St. Louis with Fort Worth, Texas, in 1890. How did the population around Fort Worth change between 1870 and 1890?
   • The population around Fort Worth increased from 6–18 people per square mile in 1870 to 18–45 people per square mile in 1890.

8. Draw the two railroad lines running northwest from Minneapolis that were completed between 1870 and 1890. How did the population of western Minnesota and eastern North Dakota change during that period?
   • The populations of western Minnesota and eastern North Dakota went from under 2 people per square mile in 1870 to 6–18 people per square mile in 1890.
9. Based on what you have learned from this activity and on the maps, do you think there was a connection between railroads and western population growth? Why or why not?

Most of the population growth between 1870 and 1890 took place along or near railroad lines. Railroads made it easier to get people and products into and out of the West—which made farming, business, and life in general easier there.

10. Do you think the West’s population grew because of the railroad or because the railroad followed population growth to places where people were already living? Explain your answer.