FROM THE EDITOR

POINT OF VIEW

Stanford Professor Richard White's book, Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America, delivers a distinctive and razor-sharp point of view about a much admired and beloved story of American triumph and the significance of California to the nation. His massive archival research undertaking and penetrating interpretation over a dozen years resulted in a hefty book that stimulated both wild acclaim and rugged criticism upon its publication in May 2011.

William Deverell, professor of history at the University of Southern California and director of the Huntington-USC Institute on California and the West, had followed development of this new story about the first transcontinental railroads—also the first huge corporations—in North America and recognized the intellectual importance and prescience of White's work. Accordingly, he convened a workshop at The Huntington Library in July in which four distinguished scholars of government, economics, technology, and western railroads shared their observations concerning Railroaded.

In this issue, we present those findings, beginning with an excerpted overview of the book from White's Introduction and Deverell's prefatory remarks, "What is this railroad to do for us?" Then Daniel Carpenter (Harvard University) addresses "Capitalism, Counterfactuals, and the National State: Reflections on Richard White's Railroaded," followed by Steven W. Usselman (Georgia Institute of Technology) examining "Railroaded, or Just Railroading?: The Mundane Madness of Management." Employing yet another slant, Naomi R. Lamoreaux (Yale University) scrutinizes White's approach in "Taking Counterfactual History Seriously," and Eric Rauchway (University of California, Davis) reviews and analyzes Railroaded's principal themes in "A Great Story, but Not a Good One."

In "Starting Arguments: Quarrels over Time and Space," Richard White rules with the last word, boldly asserting that "My goal in any book that I write is to start arguments not to finish them." Most assuredly, the author has achieved that goal in Railroaded. Undoubtedly, people will continue to take issue with White for a long time over his assertions on the transcontinentals' weighty effects on the environment, Indians, the economy, and politics.

The angle from which you view any object, the perspective you bring to any subject, the way you perceive any issue or idea, conditions and regulates your judgment, attitude, or feeling about whatever is under observation.

Indeed, everything depends on your point of view.

JANET FIREMAN

P.S. To see a new way of "doing history" that underpins Railroaded, spend some time with the Spatial History Project at http://www.stanford.edu/group/spatialhistory/cgi-bin/railroaded/.