

What is the railroad to do for *us*? — this railroad that we have looked for, hoped for, prayed for so long?

Much as the matter has been thought about and talked about; many as have been the speeches made and the newspaper articles written on the subject, there are few of us who really comprehend all it will do. We are so used to the California of the stage-coach, widely separated from the rest of the world, that we can hardly realize what the California of the railroad will be — the California netted with iron tracks, and, almost as near in point of time to Chicago and St. Louis ...

. . . realize what is coming with our railroad. All over the State, land is appreciating — fortunes are being made in a day by buying and parceling out Spanish ranches; the Government surveyors and registrars are busy; speculators are grappling the public domain by the hundreds of thousand of acres; while for miles in every direction around San Francisco, ground is being laid off into homestead lots ...

The California of the new era will be greater, richer, more powerful than the California of the past; but will she be still the same California whom her adopted children, gathered from all climes, love better than their own mother lands; from which all who have lived within her bounds are proud to hail; to which all who have known her long to return? She will have more people; but among those people will there be so large a proportion of full, true men? She will have more wealth; but will it be so evenly distributed? She will have more luxury and refinement and culture; but will she have such general comfort, so little squalor and misery; so little of the grinding, hopeless poverty that chills and cramps the souls of men, and converts them into brutes? ...

The truth is, that the completion of the railroad and the consequent great increase of business and population, will not be a benefit to all of us, but only to a portion. As a general rule (liable of course to exceptions) those who *have*, it will make wealthier; for those who *have not*, it will make it more difficult to get. Those who have lands, mines, established businesses, special abilities of certain kinds, will become richer for it and find increased opportunities; those who have only their own labor will become poorer, and find it harder to get ahead — first, because it will take more capital to buy land or to get into business; and second, because as competition reduces the wages of labor, this capital will be harder for them to obtain.

-Henry George, "What the Railroad Will Bring Us" (1868) excerpt