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## Review of *Jay Cooke's Gamble: The Northern Pacific Railroad, the Sioux, and the Panic of 1873* By M. John Lubetkin

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*Jay Cooke's Gamble: The Northern Pacific Railroad, the Sioux, and the Panic of 1873.* By M. John Lubetkin. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006. xviii + 380 pp. Maps, photographs, tables, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95.

*Jay Cooke's Gamble* engagingly chronicles the banker's failure in financing a transcontinental railroad built through northern forests and Plains largely unsettled by Europeans. The book details how negative publicity constricted bond sales at a critical juncture. News of construction difficulties, cost overruns, and suspected chicanery spread after 1870 as the Northern Pacific edged westward from Duluth,

Minnesota, to Bismarck, Dakota Territory. Survey expeditions into the Yellowstone Valley, escorted by the United States Army, sparked Lakota Sioux resistance. George Armstrong Custer's exaggerated press accounts of these skirmishes further eroded investor confidence and frightened Cooke's partners. They forced the closure of Jay Cooke & Co., thereby triggering the Panic of 1873.

M. John Lubetkin, a retired business executive turned independent scholar, has a sharp eye for human ineptitude and greed. He portrays his large cast of characters in "flesh and blood terms," adding interest to his narrative. He rightly recognizes that people, not impersonal forces, make history. Yet this strength is also a weakness. At times his lengthy biographical sketches or protracted quotations from letters and diaries distract from the main story. His preference for the personal on other occasions slights institutional, national, or international contexts in which individual choices were made. Is "dishonest graft," a characteristic shared with other federally subsidized transcontinentals, the central feature of pervasive Northern Pacific mismanagement? Managers faced formidable challenges in coordinating unprecedented amounts of capital, manpower, supplies, and equipment on a continental scale. It took time and experience to apply the managerial techniques developed by the Pennsylvania Railroad to the vaster scale of western railroads. Similarly, in United States and European markets already saturated with railroad securities, is Custer's account of Sitting Bull's resistance the crucial factor in Cooke's failure?

Lubetkin, who relies heavily on the standard Cooke biographies by E. P. Oberholtzer and Henrietta Larson, adds little to our understanding of this pioneer finance banker. Yet his well-written and informative chapters 7 through 16 on the Yellowstone survey expeditions present new perspectives about the role played by Native Americans, the United States Army, and newspaper stories in the building of the Northern Pacific. His account of these subjects rests on thorough research in diaries, correspondence, and other primary sources.

*Jay Cooke's Gamble* is handsomely produced and illustrated. It would have been better, however, had the University of Oklahoma Press distributed the photographs—including several taken by the author of sites instrumental to his story—throughout the book as they did the maps and tables.

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