

High-Speed Trains for America: Separating Fact from Fantasy

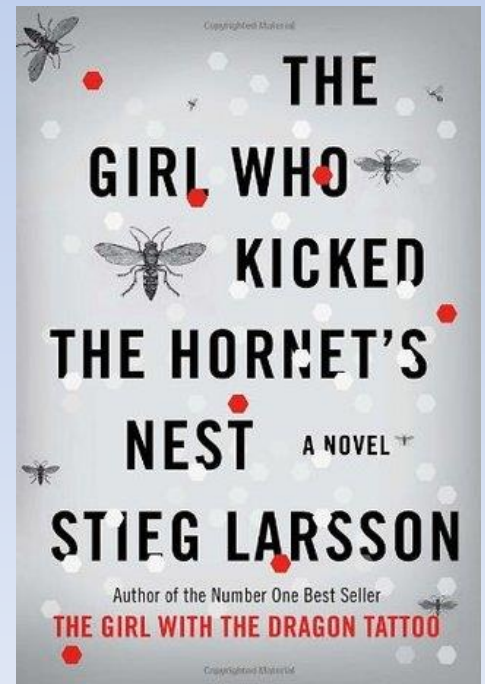
By
Carlos A. Schwantes



Subtitle:

The Old Geezer who... Kicked the Hornet's Nest

with apologies to
the late Stieg Larsson



May 20, 1971, should be considered a landmark date in American history, although few if any Americans can be expected to remember why.

May 20, 1971

What happened on that date?

On May 20, 1971, the United States House of Representatives voted to cut off funding for Boeing's supersonic transport, effectively killing the projected Boeing 2707.



Why is that noteworthy, and what does it have to do with high-speed trains?

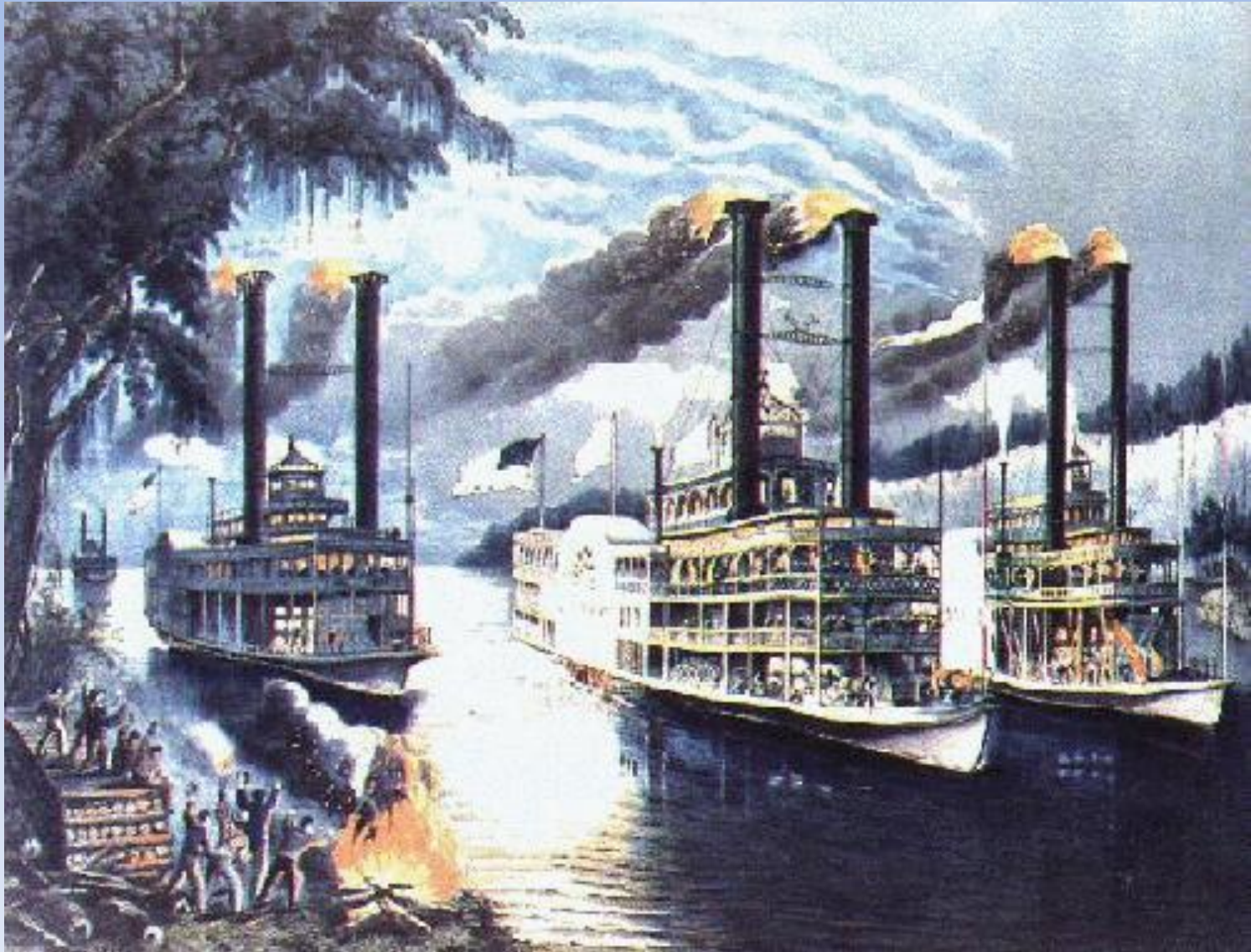
Because for the first time ever, Americans turned their backs on something that promised to go faster. For generations Americans had worshipped at the altar of speed, a worship that dated back to the fast racehorses prized in colonial America.



America's sleek clipper ships were the fastest vessels afloat.



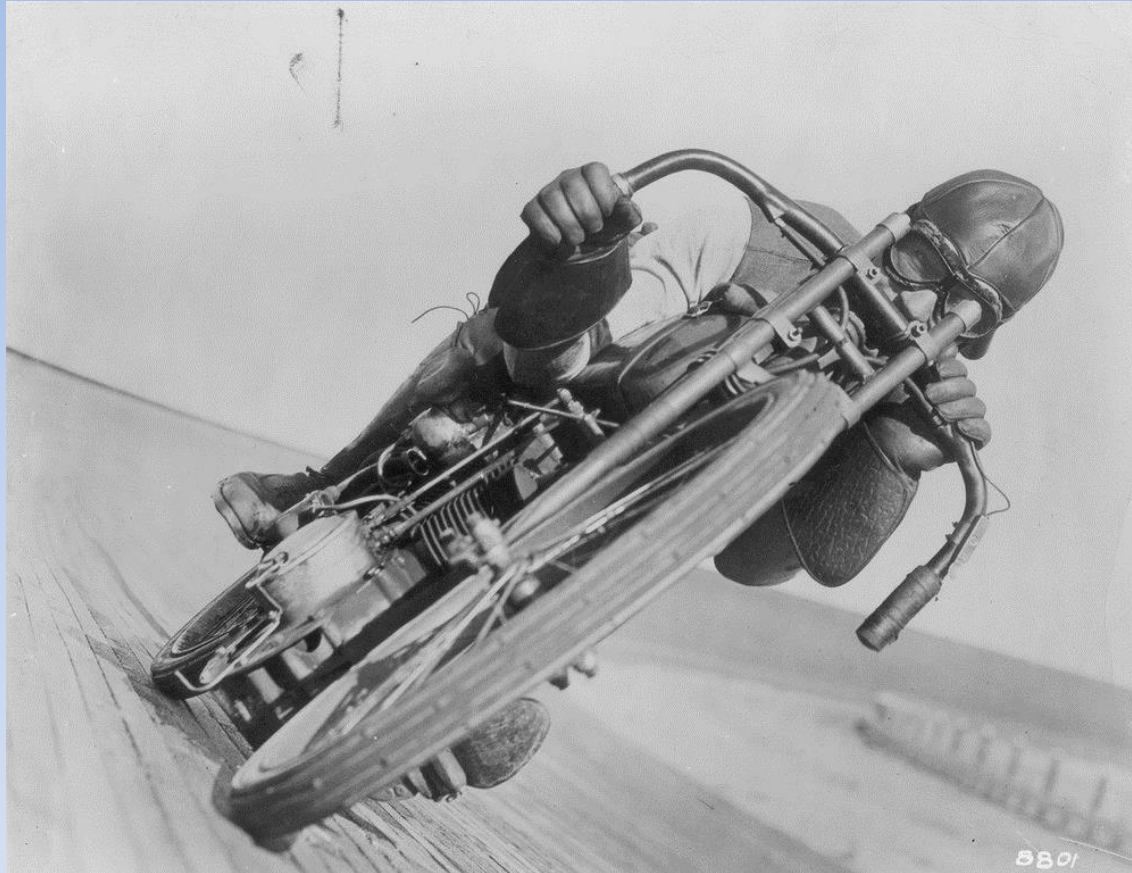
Steamboat races were the stuff of popular legends.



When bicycles came into common use in the 1880s, so did bicycle racing. Naturally!



Put a motor on a bike or its offspring
the horseless carriage, and voila!



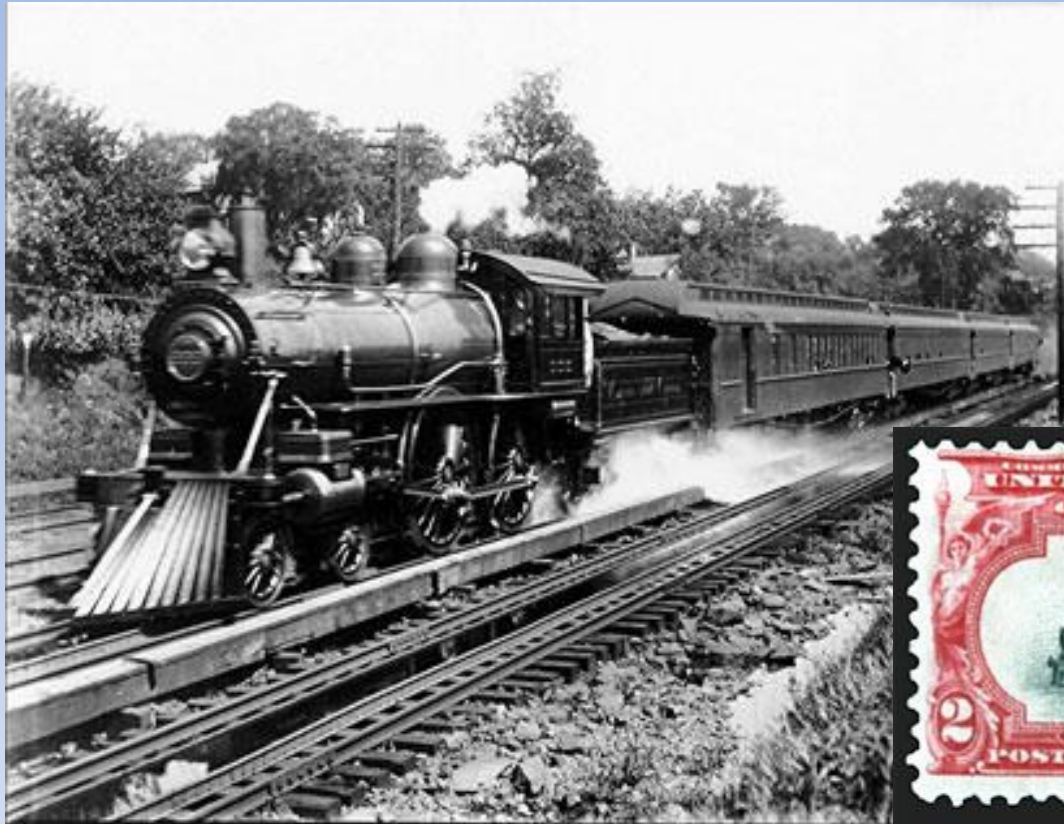
Speed, speed, and more speed was the
national mantra until 1971.

A speedy railroad train was no exception.

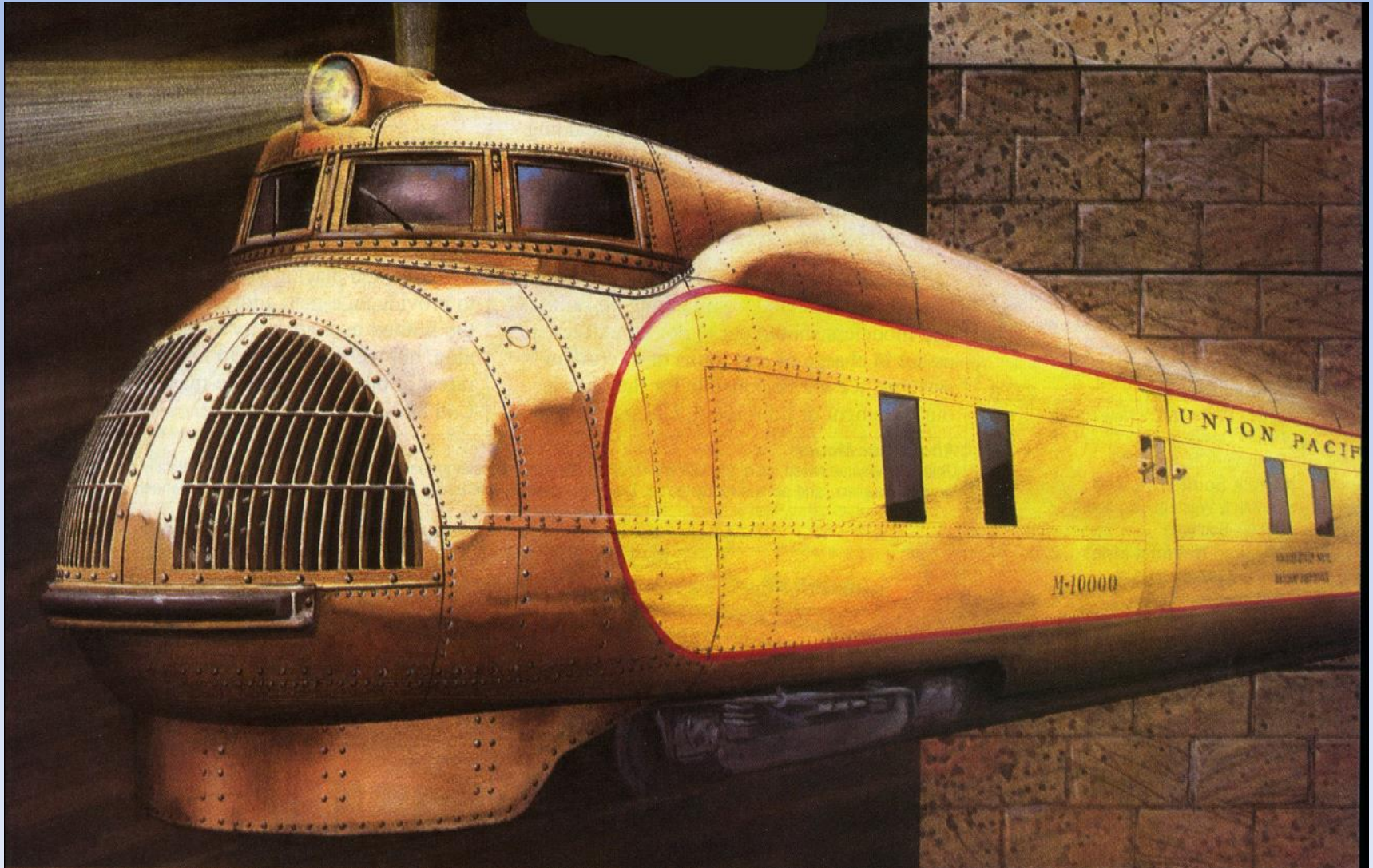


AMERICAN EXPRESS TRAIN.

New York Central's legendary speedster, locomotive 999, was featured on a 1901 stamp.



Speedy trains were always popular.
In the 1930s the streamliner was born.



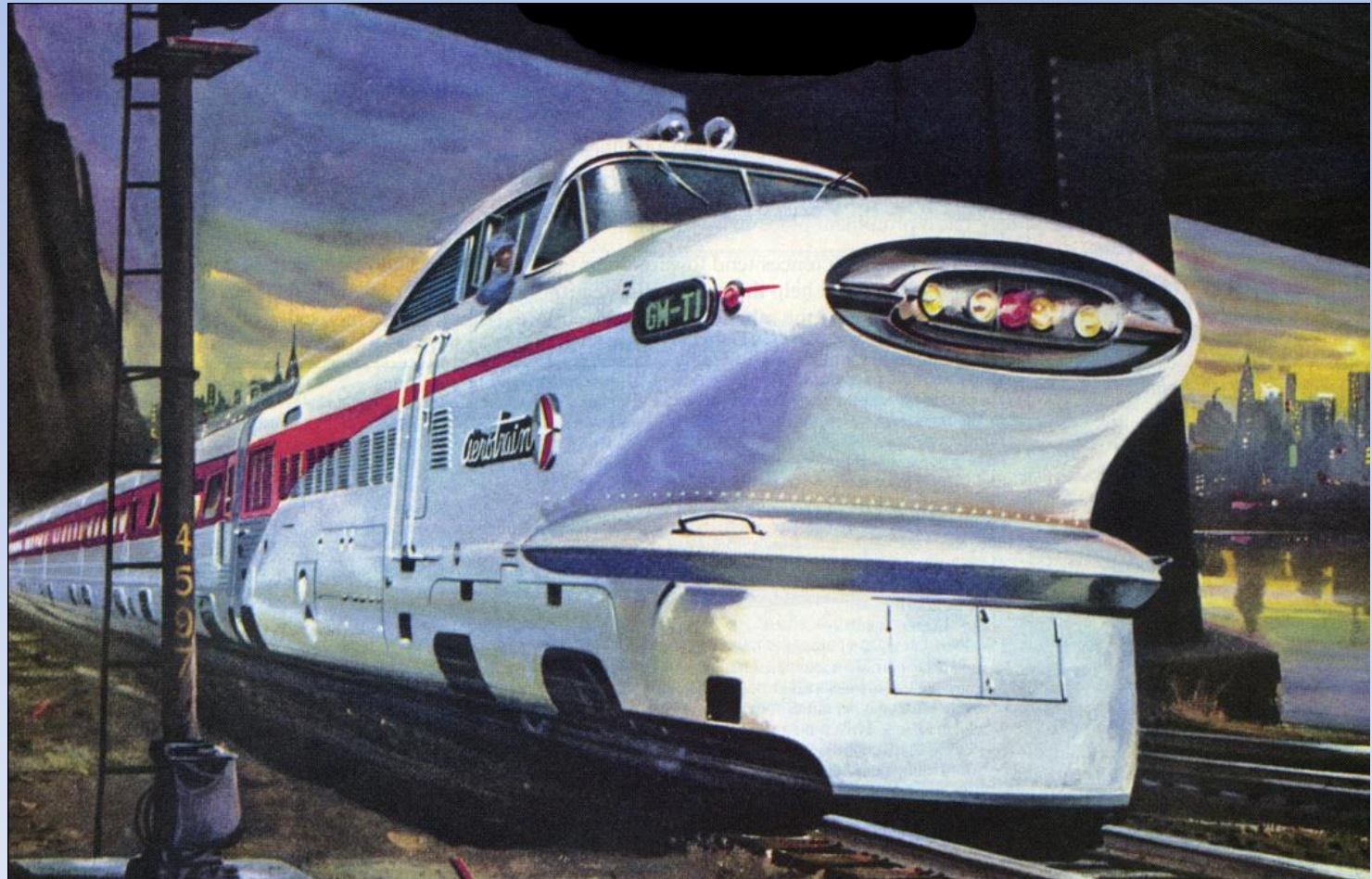
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USA



Streamline Design

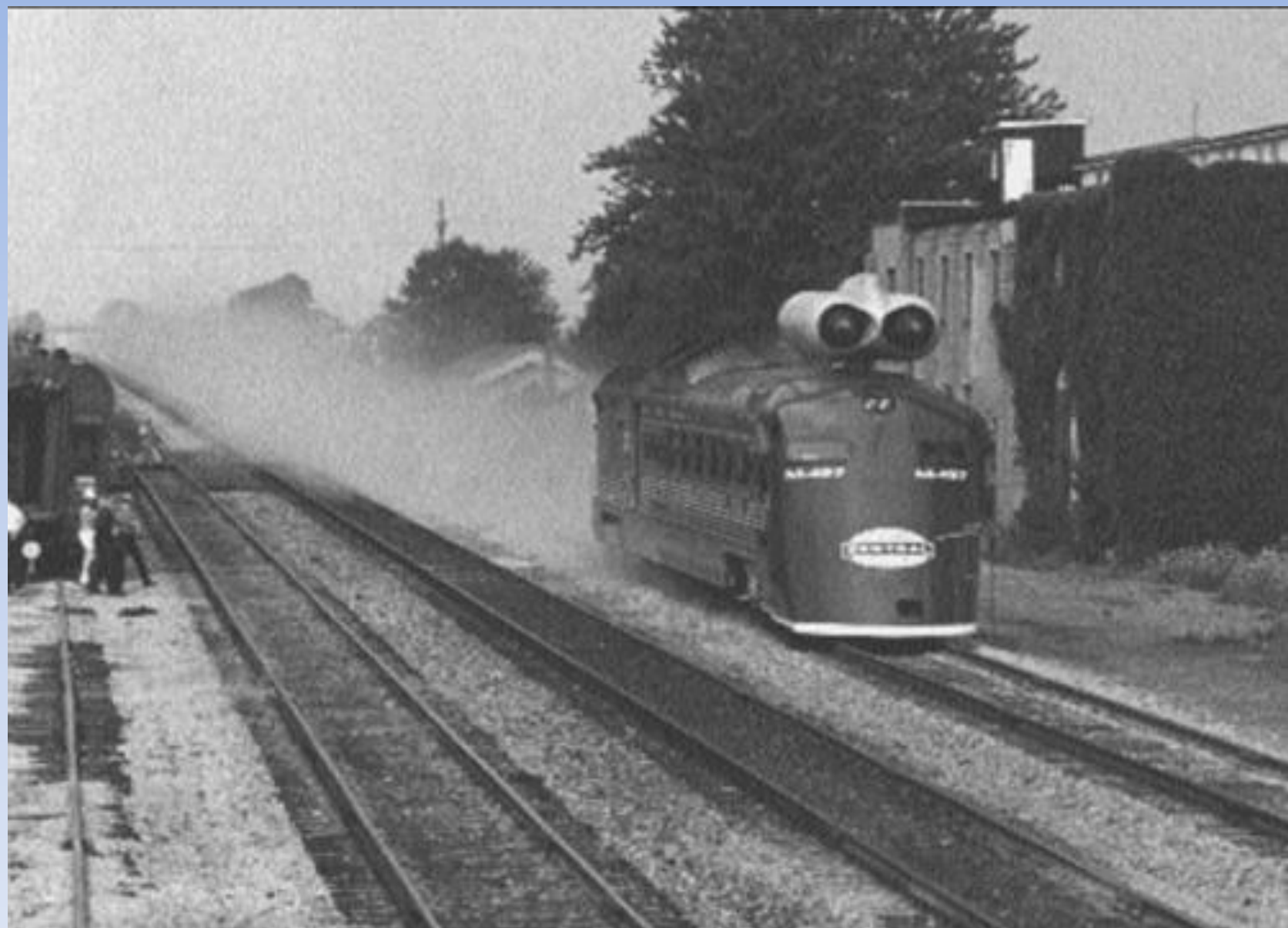
1998

During the 1950s, train speed (or at least the illusion thereof) was once again in the news.



You want speed? I'll give you speed.





The practical high-speed train as we know it today dates from Japan's introduction of the "Bullet Train" in October 1964.



Since then, France, Germany, Spain, China, and other nations have introduced modern generations of high-speed trains. Today, France's fastest TGVs routinely cruise along between Strasbourg and Paris at speeds of 190-200 miles per hour. The ride quality, I can personally testify, is smooth as silk.



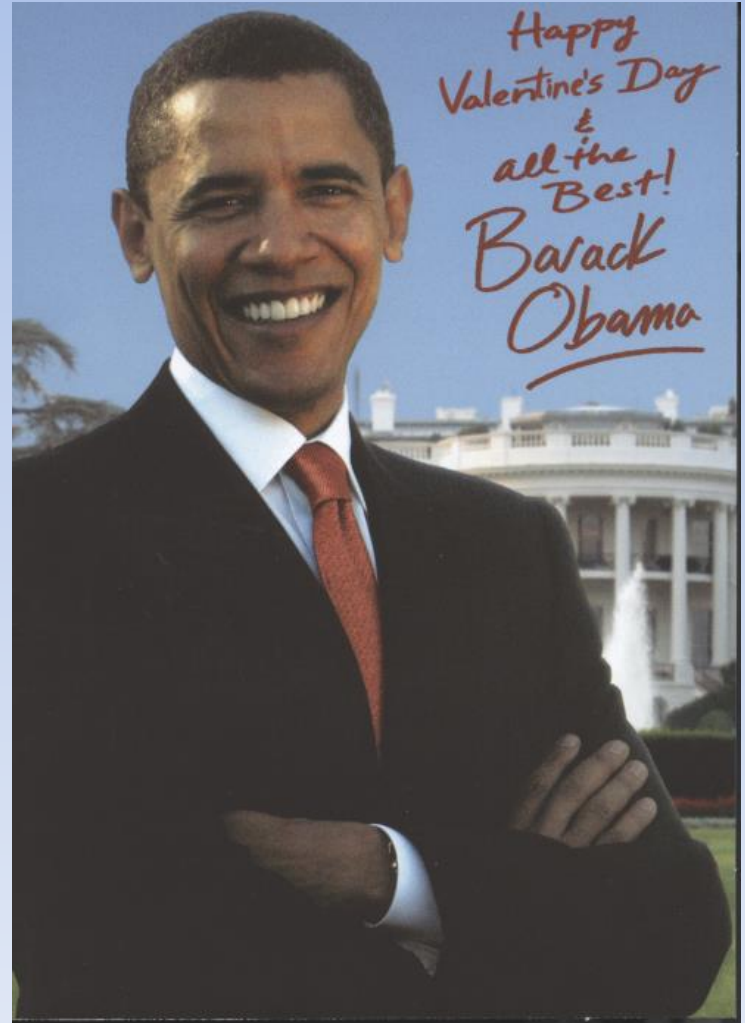
So, where does the United States fit in the world of high-speed trains? The short answer is: “nowhere.” It is not in serious competition with Japan, France, or even Spain for the speed laurels.

And here is where I kick the hornet’s nest hard:
that is at present exactly where it belongs!

Whoa, didn’t I say I love riding high-speed trains?

So why do I have such a negative view of high-speed trains for the United States?

Because at present our leaders seek to rush the United States into something for which it has no foundation and for which comparisons to other nations are deeply flawed.



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High-speed rail link to Chicago gets funds

State of the Union

End 'tired old battle'

Job creation President Obama will announce the creation of a second job corridor providing three round trips daily to St. Louis.

Health care reform Called on Congress to pass a second job corridor providing three round trips daily to St. Louis.

Deficit reduction Proposed a three-year freeze on most domestic spending.

Energy/climate Urged passage of legislation to help country shift to clean energy.

BY BILL LAMBRECHT
blambrecht@post-dispatch.com
202-298-6880

WASHINGTON • The White House today will announce the awarding of \$1.1 billion in stimulus money for a high-speed rail corridor providing three round trips daily between St. Louis and Chicago at 110 miles per hour along most of the route.

In addition, Missouri will receive \$30 million for eight projects intended to upgrade passenger rail service between St. Louis and Kansas City.

The announcement will be made in St. Louis this afternoon by Ed Montgomery, White House executive director for auto communities and workers. He is to be accompanied by Gov. Jay Nixon, Rep. Russ Carnahan, D-St. Louis, and other political and transportation leaders.

The outlay is part of White House plans to award \$8 billion for high-speed rail and related improvements across the country. President Barack Obama was to travel to Tampa, Fla., today to announce the grants, one of his administration's key initiatives.

The White House said in a statement Wednesday night that the government planned to fund its new large-scale, high-speed rail corridors across the country. Blaming the spending to President Dwight Eisenhower's commitment to interstate highways.

See RAIL • Page A7

STIMULUS MONEY
The Obama administration is



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High-speed rail link to Chicago gets funds

\$1.1 billion would start corridor offering 3 round trips daily to St. Louis.

BY BILL LAMBRECHT
blambrecht@post-dispatch.com
202-298-6880

WASHINGTON • The White House today will announce the awarding of \$1.1 billion in stimulus money for a high-speed rail corridor providing three round trips

Every other nation in the world that has implemented high-speed trains already has a solid foundation of secondary or feeder trains in place. Apart mainly from the Northeast Corridor, the United States does not.

I took the following pictures a couple of years ago at the main railway station in Frankfurt, Germany. In addition, local trains and streetcars feed into the Frankfurt's Hauptbahnhof, and collectively they illustrate my point: high-speed trains cannot operate in isolation from other modes of travel.



HAUPTBAHNHOF







Information

Vaihingen
er Enz

DB

111 194

105



Information

Ausgang Süd

Ende Straße
Ende Linie

S

Ausgang Nord
Fußweg Messe

Ende Straße, Haltepunkt an der Fuß
Gartenstraße, Fußweg & Fußweg

15:54

Mannheim -
Karlsruhe -
Karlsruhe Hbf



16:06

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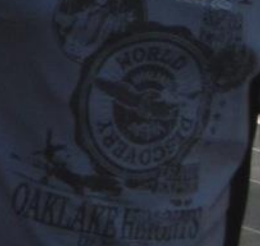
Langen - Darmstadt -
Darmstadt - Weiskirchen

13

Heidelberg Hbf

13

TRAVEL
EXPERT





Often the comparison is made to what is currently a fantastic system of high-speed trains in operation in Japan. But any comparison between passenger trains in the United States and Japan is full of flaws. The same applies to comparisons between the United States and France and Germany.

Here is why.



First of all, Japan is a nation the size of California, but with a population four times as great.

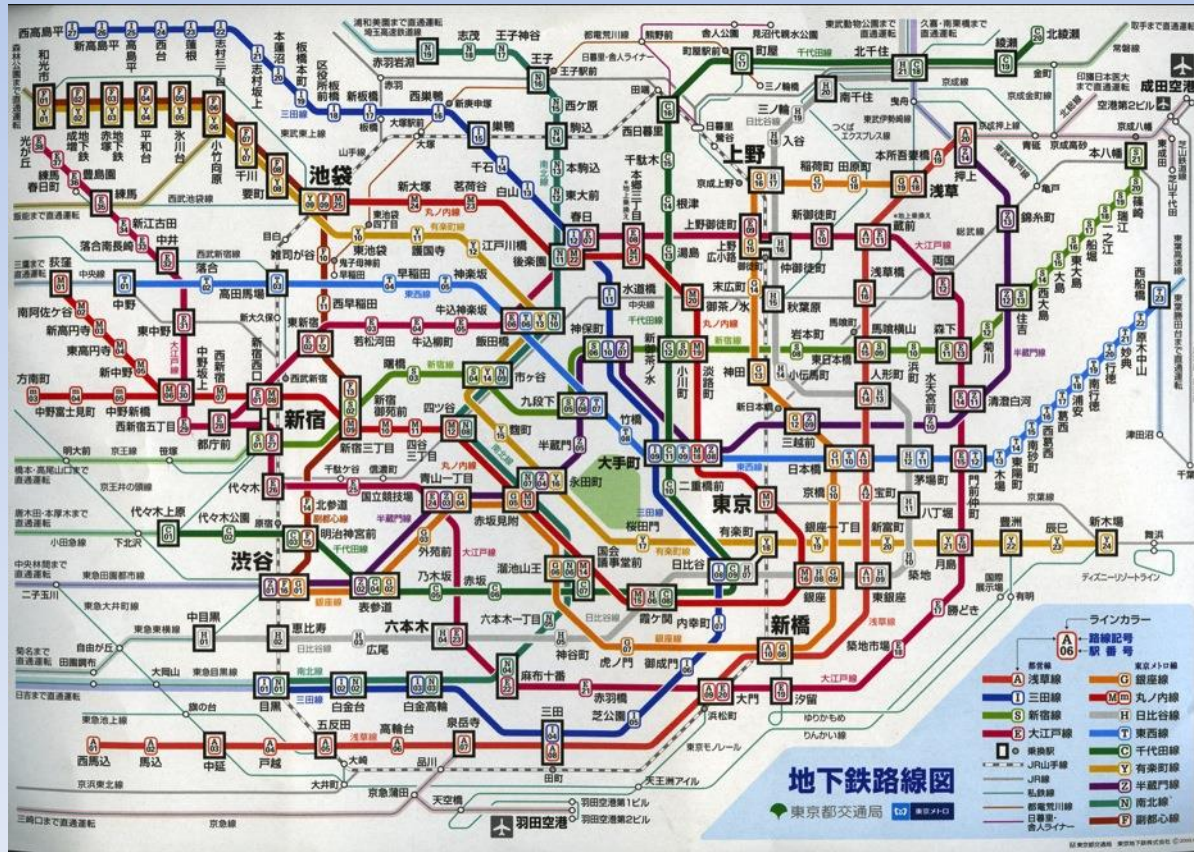


127 million



37 million

Secondly, in all cities served by the Shinkansen, or high-speed trains, an excellent network of public transportation lines is in place and well connected to the rail stations. Here is a map just for central Tokyo.



A nighttime photograph of a dense urban skyline in Tokyo. Several tall skyscrapers are visible, their windows glowing with warm yellow and white light. The building on the left has a distinctive circular structure on its roof, illuminated with a cool blue light. The sky is a dark, overcast grey. In the lower portion of the image, the lights of a city street and some greenery are visible, providing a sense of scale and location.

Tokyo

The population of Tokyo, incidentally, is around 12 million people, one third of the population of the entire state of California.



Car cleaners bowing to Tokyo train travelers.

From the time they are small children, the Japanese are “train conscious.” Japan has no system of school buses. Even first graders must learn to ride the subway and train.

Fortunately, Japan ranks as the safest country in the world, its trains and stations are generally spotlessly clean, and its people unfailingly polite.

In my “Railroads in American Life” class I have students in their twenties who have NEVER ridden a train.



**Railway engineers are still
childhood heroes in Japan**





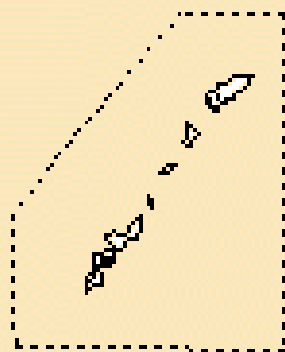
Shinkansen

2500

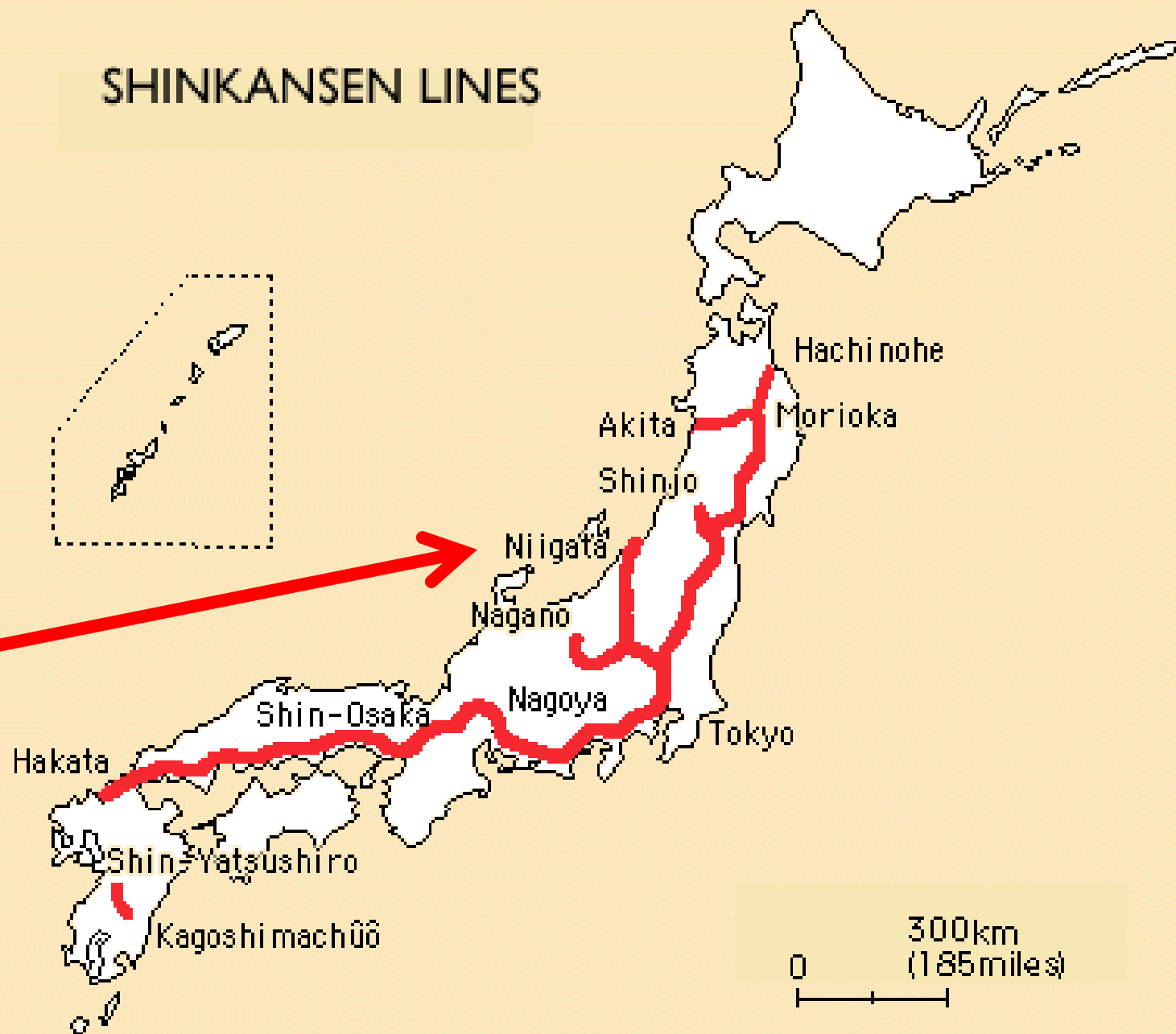
But even in Japan the politicians have politicized high-speed rail. In the 1990s, the Japanese prime minister pushed construction of a high-speed line from Tokyo through the mountains to his hometown of Niigata. The cost of digging the many tunnels put Japan Rail heavily into debt.

Can politicians of any nation, especially the United States, resist building high-speed lines for political reasons instead of sticking to sound economic reasons?

SHINKANSEN LINES



Niigata



Niigata

Tsubame-sanjo

Nagaoka

Urasa

Echigo-yuzawa

Jomo-kogen

Takasaki

Honjo-waseda

Kumagaya

Omiya
Ueno

Tokyo



Boon or Boondoggle?

It is a cliché to say that Americans have had an inordinately great love affair with the automobile, but it is true. As a result our cities sprawl endlessly across the landscape to make a centrally located railway station impractical today.





Approaching Atlanta by air.



How much do I love thee?

The so-called high-speed trains between Chicago and Saint Louis will connect only the central cities, not the airports, such as high-speed trains do for Paris, Frankfurt, and other major cities.

This only makes sense for the United States, too. The Saint Louis-Chicago line should ideally connect O'Hare and Midway airports with Lambert airport in St. Louis. Given the spatial relationships that exist in the United States, travelers will likely drive their cars to the airports or train stations.



The beautiful interface between plane and train in Frankfurt, Germany.

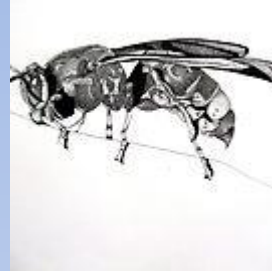
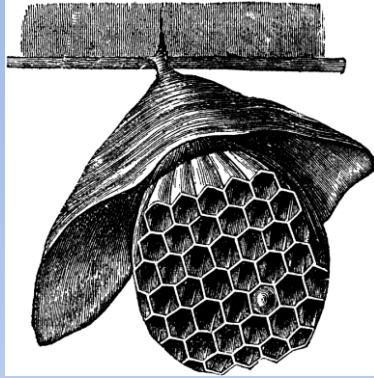
A student once asked me: “What incentives would you provide to get travelers to ride high-speed trains?”

Most advocates of high-speed trains for America seem to believe that “if you build it, they will come.” But will they?

The student’s question is a good one because if we have to provide incentives, then the whole concept of high-speed trains for America is deeply flawed.



Let me now kick the hornet's nest even harder!



Advocates of high-speed trains frequently compare the United States to nations that already have high-speed trains in operation, as I have done. But let me conclude with some food for thought that you may find hard to digest—or positively revolting.

Be forewarned!

California recently approved a high-speed rail line between Los Angeles and San Francisco. The current estimated cost for what is called “Phase One” is \$68 billion.

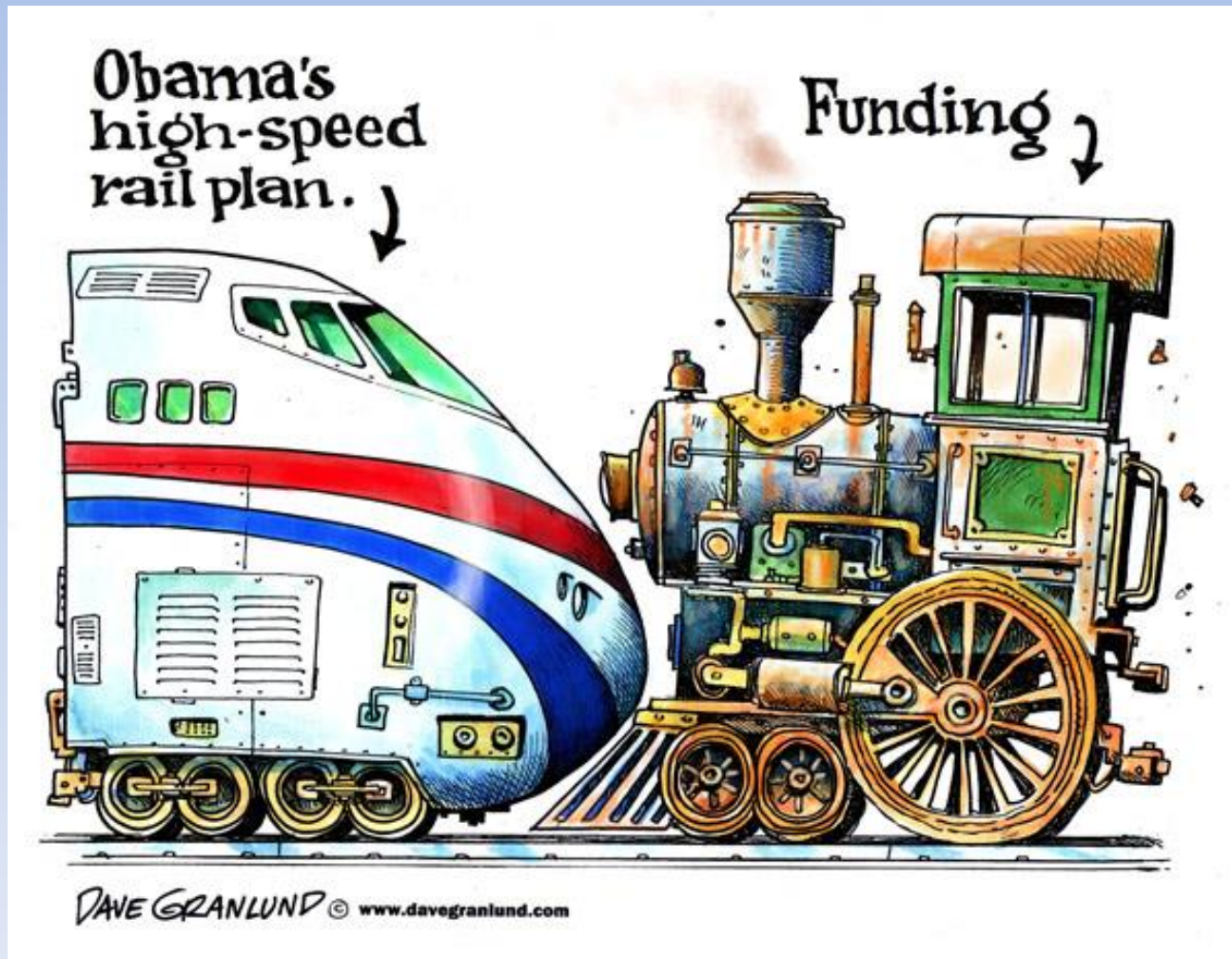


Indeed, the California proposal does look absolutely beautiful...



on paper!

But where does the \$58 billion for California's "Phase One" originate? California, like the United States, is deeply in debt.



Just ponder the following figures:

The cost to the United States of its war in Vietnam was around \$111 billion according to the Congressional Research Service.

The cost of the Gulf War was around \$61 Billion.
The War in Iraq cost us around 715 billion.

Since 9/11/2001, we have spent another trillion dollars trying to police the world.

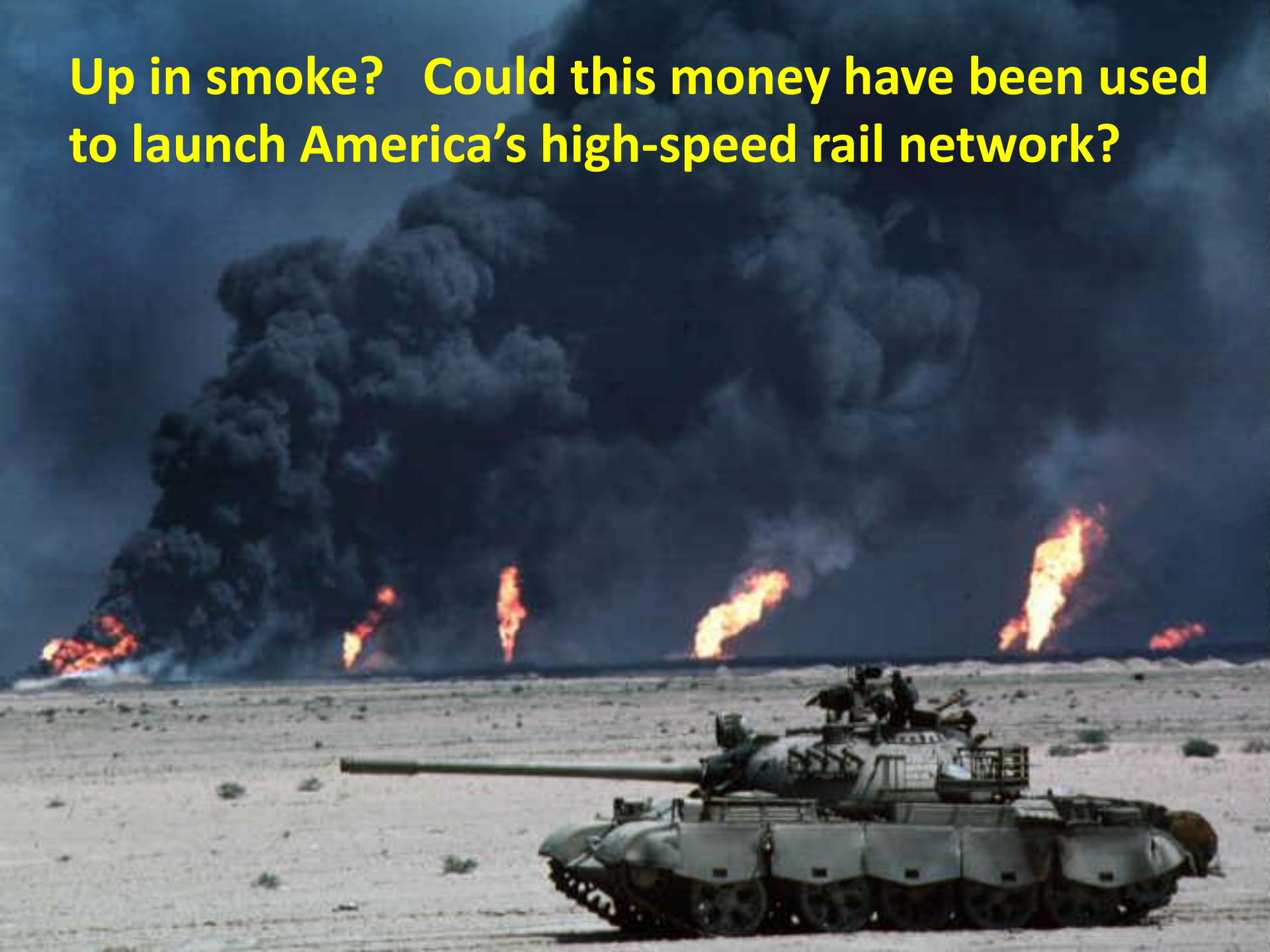


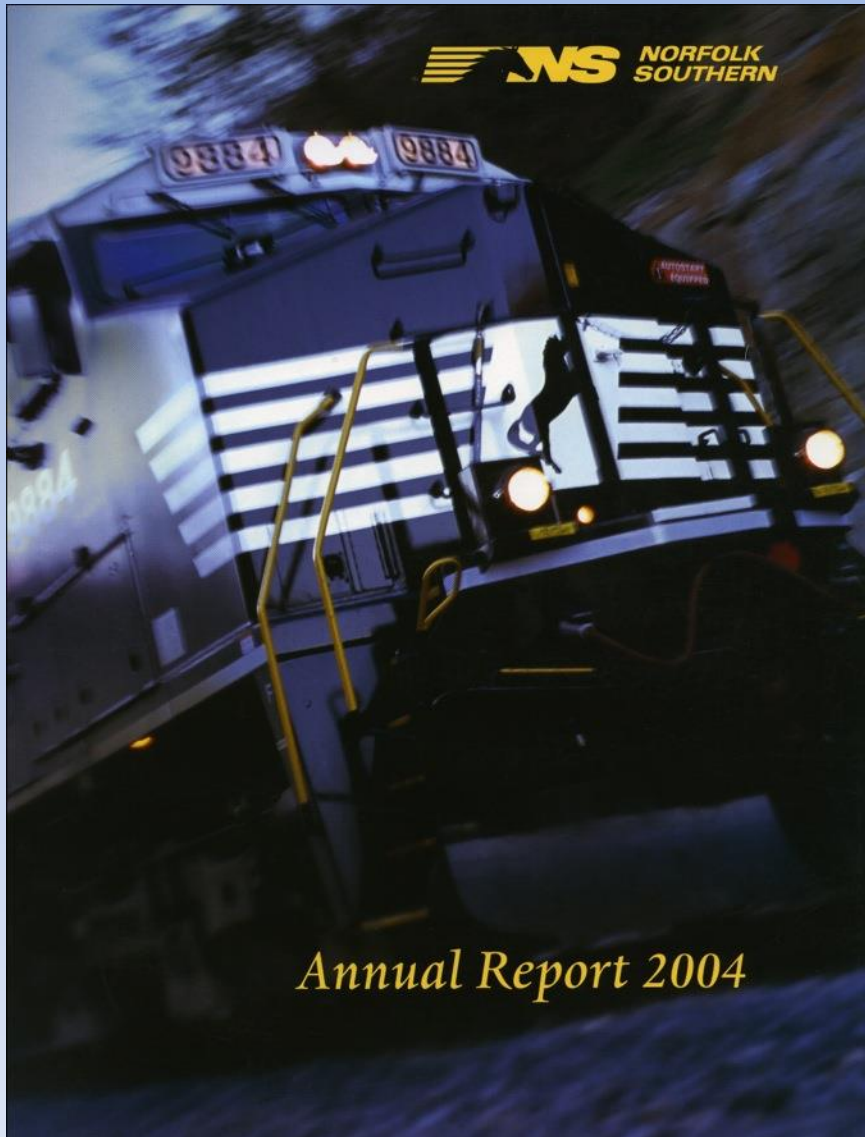
“War is Hell!”

France has approximately 1,200 miles of high-speed lines in all. How much did it cost to build and equip those lines? Those figures are very hard to obtain, but I estimate the cost to be around cost around \$300 billion. Likewise, the Japanese high-Speed network probably cost around \$400 billion.

Do I reveal a trace of bitterness as I look at these figures. Just imagine what our tax dollars would have purchased in terms of a high-speed rail network.

Up in smoke? Could this money have been used to launch America's high-speed rail network?





**Freight Trains:
the REAL future of
high-speed rail in
America**

Wyoming



The End!



**Have a nice day! And I mean that.
Are there any questions?**