

Unit 3- Essay: Robber Barons vs. Captains of Industry

Essay Prompt: Were the Industrialists of the 19th Century Robber Barons or Captains of Industry/Philanthropists?

Background:

During the late 19th century, industrialists such as Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, Cornelius Vanderbilt, and J.P. Morgan played a pivotal role in shaping America's economy and infrastructure. Their vast fortunes were built through industries like steel, oil, railroads, and banking, revolutionizing the U.S. into a leading industrial power. However, historians and scholars have long debated whether these figures should be seen as *philanthropists*—who generously used their wealth to benefit society—or as *robber barons*—who exploited workers and manipulated markets for personal gain.

In your essay, answer the following questions to decide how these men should be remembered:

1. **Wealth and Business Practices** – How did these men gain their wealth? Were their methods fair, or did they involve unfair tactics like monopolies, poor treatment of workers, or corruption?
2. **Impact on America** – How did they help build America's economy, industries, and cities? Did these improvements come at the cost of harming workers or smaller businesses?
3. **Philanthropy** – Many of these men gave away large amounts of money to libraries, schools, and charities. Was this generosity a true desire to help people, or mainly a way to improve their reputations after using harsh business practices?
4. **Overall Legacy** – In the end, should we remember them as “Captains of Industry” (successful leaders who helped the country), “Robber Barons” (selfish businessmen who hurt others), or a mix of both?

Guidelines:

- Support your arguments with specific examples, including business practices, treatment of workers, contributions to society, and public perception during the Gilded Age.
- Be sure to reference primary and secondary sources where appropriate.
 - The only “copying and pasting” that is acceptable is for directly quoting a source.
 - ALL PARAPHRASING should be YOUR OWN WORDS!!!!
 - Make sure to footnote everything and include the full citation in your bibliography
- Reference at least 2 of the men we've discussed in class: Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, J.P. Morgan, or Cornelius Vanderbilt.

Format:

- ☐ Font Size 12; Times New Roman
- ☐ Double-Spaced
- ☐ Length: 3-5 pages
- ☐ Use at least three credible sources (books, articles, documentaries, etc.). NO BRITANICA/ WIKIPEDIA
- ☐ Chicago-style format, including footnote citations and a works cited page.