Jason Lyons

Mr. DeCarlo

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John D. Rockefeller was the richest man in the history of the USA, and got to this point through being a captain of industry. The industrial boom had many positives and negatives that came along with it. Most of these ups and downs were purely because of the industrial giants of the time, like Rockefeller and Vanderbilt. Their modernization of the economy and their philanthropy were very good attributes but on the other side, they had many self-interests which led to a lot of corruption all around America. Even though it can be argued that they were robber barons, they were captains of industry to a much greater extent throughout the industrial age.

It is easily argued that these men of the late 19th century were captains of industry. To start off, these men had very efficient industries. They expand the industrial capacity by lowering costs, while raising the quality of their products. John D. Rockefeller was very important during this time in how efficient his industry was. His main products were many oil based products such as paint or petroleum jelly which people could use on a daily basis. He created a lot of pipelines and much more. Another captain of industry with an efficient industry was Andrew Carnegie. The Bessimer Blast Furnace and his way of creating steel lead to a whole new industry in steelworks and steel ships. These businesses were so efficient because they grew on their own and they didn’t need any help from the government. Another reason why these great men were captains of industry is because of the economy in America that they created. They created a modernized economy, much like it is now by trying to create large corporations and by spreading the industrialism out west. Also, the annual income grows to where it had never been before, it turns America into the best economy in the world and the wealth of our nation quadrupled. Finally, the last reason why they were captains of industry was because of their philanthropy. Carnegie for one gave away 350 million dollars to a charity, while giving money to both libraries and schools. He was one of the first people to distribute their wealth and he also founded many institutions. Rockefeller was also a large philanthropist by donating over 530 million dollars to charities. Overall, they were captains of industry due to some main qualities, but on the other side they could also be seen as robber barons.

One main reason why it could be seen as the industrial big businessmen were robber barons was because of the political corruption that came along with them. Rockefeller, Carnegie and Vanderbilt were all known as people that bribed legislature, and they also convinced other politicians to team up with them, such as the Senator that was known as “Senator from standard oil” because of how he teamed up with Rockefeller. The Sherman Antitrust Act that came in response to this didn’t even work due to the fact that these large corporations kept most of the power that they had before this act was passed. Another main reason why these people could be seen as robber barons is because of the Economic Corruption that came during the time of industrialism. They controlled the people through the peoples own money. Stocks inflated prices destroying smaller companies and making some investors become broke. Also, because of the monopolies, people lost jobs from businesses going out of business and there wasn’t much choice in what you could buy even though the prices were very high. Also, the wages were very low so the workers could barely even pay bills and support their families. Finally, the last reason why they were partially robber barons was because of their harsh treatment of the workers. Unskilled workers were used to make it so they were easier to replace and they were paid less. Child labor was also used which was a way of getting cheap labor but they destroyed these kids lives.

There were great points throughout the rebuttal defending the thought that these men were captains of industry. One main idea is that even though these men used unskilled workers to be able to get rid of them easier, there are still unskilled workers being used throughout America today. So if using unskilled workers was so bad, then all of the restaurants today are very bad because they also use unskilled workers to fill positions. Also, these people could be easily seen as being generous, because for an example, Rockefeller gave money to the poor even when he wasn’t rich, and he saved lives by donating so much money. They also saved lives by creating over 6 million jobs throughout America. Even though the wages that we had seemed very low and to the point where they were abusing their power, our wages in America at this time were higher than any other nation in the world. Also, there was an argument made about the triangle shirtwaist Factory fire, and even though this was a very bad thing that happened, this had nothing to do with the Big Businessmen of the time, but it had more to do with Industrialism as a whole. Overall, even though some things that were bad happened because of them, there were many more great things that they did, leading to an overall significance of them being in power when they were.

On the other hand, many arguments were made defending the opinion that he was a robber baron. One idea is that if we were living back in the late 19th century, early 20th century, then we probably wouldn’t be in school at this time, and instead we would be in a factory working for little money. Also, even though these men donated their money, they donated to schools where they would teach kids about how great of people they were.