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THE WAY WE SAW IT

“ROBBER BARONS” OR “CAPTAINS OF INDUSTRY”?

Competing Images of the American Entrepreneur

IN ILLUSTRATION AND ART

A Teacher's
Resource Booklet

with Lesson Plans and Reproducible
Student Activity Assignments



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10200 Jefferson Blvd., P.O. Box 802
Culver City, CA 90232
United States of America

(310) 839-2436
(800) 421-4246

Fax: (800) 944-5432
Fax: (310) 839-2249

<http://mindsparks.com>
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Introduction

Competing Images of the Entrepreneur

Mark Twain labeled America's post-Civil War era “the Gilded Age.” It was a perfect description of a time when a new, enormously rich business class engaged in garish displays of wealth, colossal swindles and tawdry political manipulation. Meanwhile, burgeoning cities filling up with immigrants produced massive slums and social disorders of a new and disturbing kind. It's no wonder the emerging industrial leaders of the time were often castigated as a new class of “Robber Barons.” They were powerful, often ruthless men whose wealth was seen as based on exploitation and whose social status was seen as utterly undeserved.

Yet the same era also generated a completely different way of looking at all this. In this other view, a new generation of inventors and entrepreneurs was ushering in an industrial golden age. The wealth of these men was enormous, but so to was their positive impact on the economy. Amazing new modes of transportation and communication held hope of linking every city and village into a more unified and orderly society. Meanwhile, huge industrial enterprises would make the nation strong and give work to its growing millions. It's little wonder that to some, therefore, the Robber Barons were heroic “Captains of Industry.”

Which of these images was correct is not at issue here. The purpose of this booklet/transparency set is simply to give you materials you can use to explore fully this important theme in late nineteenth and early twentieth century American life. The illustrations in the booklet are presented in four lessons. Each lesson uses three visual displays to explore one broad topic in the overall story. Briefly, the four lessons are as follows:

The Triumph of Technology

Illustrations stressing the heroic status of the inventor entrepreneur, with a look at Thomas Edison, the invention of the telephone, the automobile, the assembly line and the triumph of the Wright brothers.

The Rich and Famous and the Teeming Masses

Wealth and the ostentatious display of wealth coexisted with child labor, slums and abject poverty. The stories of Horatio Alger exemplify the way in which many Americans held onto hope about how these huge social problems might be resolved.

Captains of an Industrial Giant? ...

The illustrations here focus on such figures as Cornelius Vanderbilt, Andrew Carnegie, J. P. Morgan and Henry Ford, and they emphasize the positive view of these men held at the time by millions of Americans.

... Or Predatory Robber Barons?

Millions of other Americans resented these “malefactors of great wealth,” as Theodore Roosevelt once called them. The editorial cartoons here explore three different aspects of the Robber Baron image so often applied to the industrial giants of the age.

Using Photos, Cartoons, and Other Visuals to Teach History

Most textbooks today are full of colorful visuals. But all too often these visuals function primarily as window dressing. They make the text more entertaining, or at least more palatable. But only occasionally do the visuals in textbooks do more than offer simple pictorial reinforcement of ideas already presented in the text. In many cases, they pander to the visual orientation of the young while doing little to help young people master the challenges of the visual media that dominate their lives.

By way of contrast, our approach to using visual materials emphasizes their unique strengths as historical documents. The lessons in this booklet focus students on the visual symbols and metaphors in editorial cartoons, the dramatic qualities of certain photographs, the potential of many images to make abstract ideas more specific and concrete, the implicit biases and stereotypes in certain images, their emotional power, and their ability to invoke the spirit of a time and place. In the process, we make every effort to strengthen students' visual literacy skills in general, as well as their ability to think critically and engage in spirited but disciplined discussions.

How to Use This Booklet

The booklet is divided into four lessons, with three illustrations per lesson. Each lesson consists of the following:

A BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET This page provides brief summaries explaining the three illustrations on which the lesson is based and their relevance to the lesson's objectives.

CD-ROM WITH IMAGES The ImageXaminer allows you to project the images for use in your class discussions. The CD-ROM also includes a folder containing all of the discussion questions and follow-up questions in pdf format. All of the images are also in pdf format, should you wish to create overhead transparencies.

DISCUSSION-ACTIVITY SHEETS FOR EACH ILLUSTRATION

Each sheet displays one illustration. It includes a sequence of questions to help you plan an all-class discussion while using the images in the ImageXaminer. The questions take students step by step through an analysis of the illustration. If you wish, you may reproduce these pages and hand them out. In addition to the discussion questions on the illustration itself, one or two follow-up activities are suggested. Some of these can be made into individual assignments. Others will work best as small group or all-class activities.

“Robber Barons” or “Captains of Industry”? Competing Images of the American Entrepreneur

**OBJECTIVES
FOR THIS LESSON:**

1. Students will better understand how certain key inventions helped transform American industry in the late 1800s and early 1900s.
 2. Students will understand why the inventor-entrepreneur came to be seen as a kind of hero in those years.
-

The Triumph of Technology

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE ILLUSTRATIONS:

Illustration 1

After the Civil War, an America still made up largely of small rural villages began to experience sweeping changes. In hundreds of ways, new inventions and business practices began to tie these rural communities together into a much more organized national society. One of the most powerful inventions helping to do that was the telephone, invented by Alexander Graham Bell. The allegorical illustration here helps capture the wonder of the invention and the sense people had that it was transforming their lives. Thomas Edison, shown in his laboratory, made some major contributions to the development of the telephone, along with many other enormously important inventions of his own. As a result, inventors like Edison and Bell soon began to be seen as the heroes of a new age.

Illustration 2

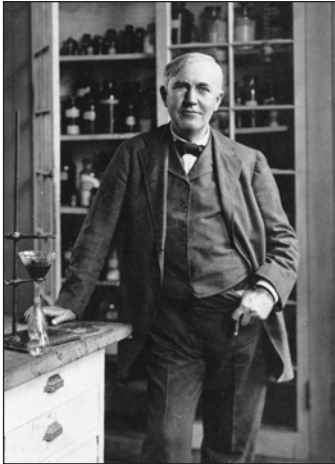
Communication breakthroughs were only part of the story of this time of technological change. In a nation as big as ours, transportation had always been a central concern. By the mid-1800s, railroads were already spreading across the land. But railroad building really came of age in the post-Civil War period. The turn of the century brought a new revolution in transportation — the automobile. Accompanying it were other related triumphs of business and technology, Henry Ford’s auto assembly line production methods, for instance, or the Brooklyn Bridge and the thousands of other roads, bridges and other structures that tied the sprawling nation together through an intricate transportation network.

Illustration 3

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, inventors became the mythic heroes of the age. It was they, above all others, who were bringing a new and brighter future into existence. That was certainly the way Orville and Wilbur Wright were seen. The main photo of them here also suggests something else about inventors that captured people’s imagination. It was still a time when a single individual — or two brothers — could change the world on their own. Many of the great business leaders of the day appeared to be self-made masters of industry. Enough, at least, so that this theme became one of the key ideas shaping the debate Americans had in those decades about these giants of industrial life.

Lesson 1 — The Triumph of Technology

Illustration 1



Courtesy of the Library of Congress



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustration

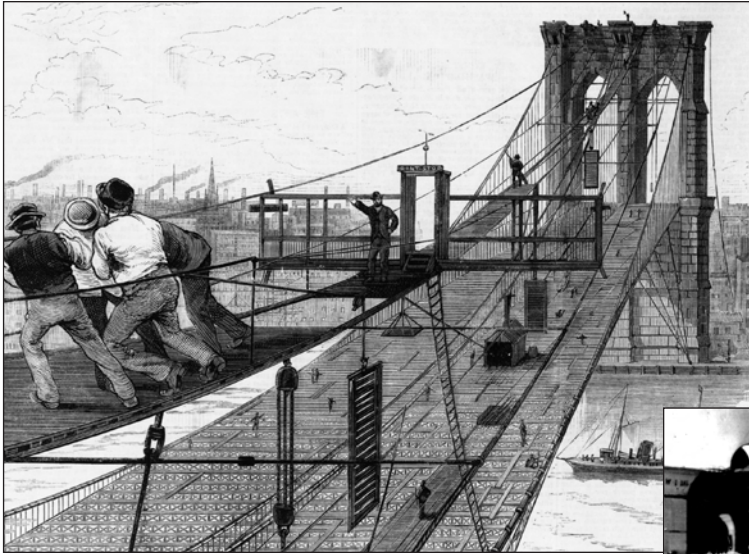
1. The last quarter of the 19th century has often been called the “age of invention.” One reason for that has to do with the man in the upper left here. Can you name him?
2. Thomas Edison invented many enormously important devices. Can you name some of them?
- 3 The large illustration here has to do with another key invention of those times, the telephone. Who invented the telephone?
4. The illustration stresses the importance of the telephone in changing life in America. What big changes in American life are portrayed here? How is the telephone seen as contributing to those changes?
5. Inventors like Edison and Bell came to be seen as great heroes in the late 1800s and early 1900s. How does the larger illustration here help to explain why this was so?

Follow-up Activities

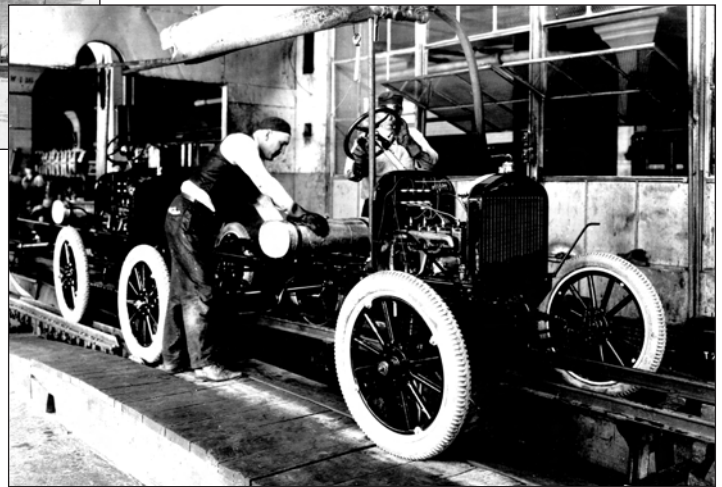
1. Thomas Edison famously summed up his working methods when he said, “Genius is one percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration.” Read a biography of Thomas Edison. As you read, take note of as many important inventions of his as you can. Then, write a report on his inventions. Explain how those inventions helped change society and, in particular, the different ways they helped unify the nation.
2. Small Group Activity: Read more about the history of the telegraph, the telephone and the computer. Today we tend to think that computers are altering our sense of connection to the larger world as never before. But some would say the telegraph and the telephone had just as great an impact, if not more, in this way. As a group, research each of these three inventions and debate amongst yourselves which of them really had the biggest impact. Then give a report to the class on your views, and guide the class in a debate on this topic.

Lesson 1 — The Triumph of Technology

Illustration 2



Courtesy of the Library of Congress



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustration

1. The telephone and other communications inventions were one kind of technical change altering America in the late 1800s. Another major kind had to do with transportation. Can you identify the famous bridge on the left?
2. When it opened in 1883, the Brooklyn Bridge was the longest suspension bridge in the world. How do you think the Brooklyn Bridge altered life in New York, America's largest city?
3. On the right is another transportation-related breakthrough of the early 1900s, the automobile assembly line. Obviously, the automobile transformed life in many ways. Why was the assembly line itself such an important development?
4. Given the nature of American society and geography, it is no accident that many of the huge technical breakthroughs of the late 1800s had something to do with transportation and communication. Can you explain this statement?

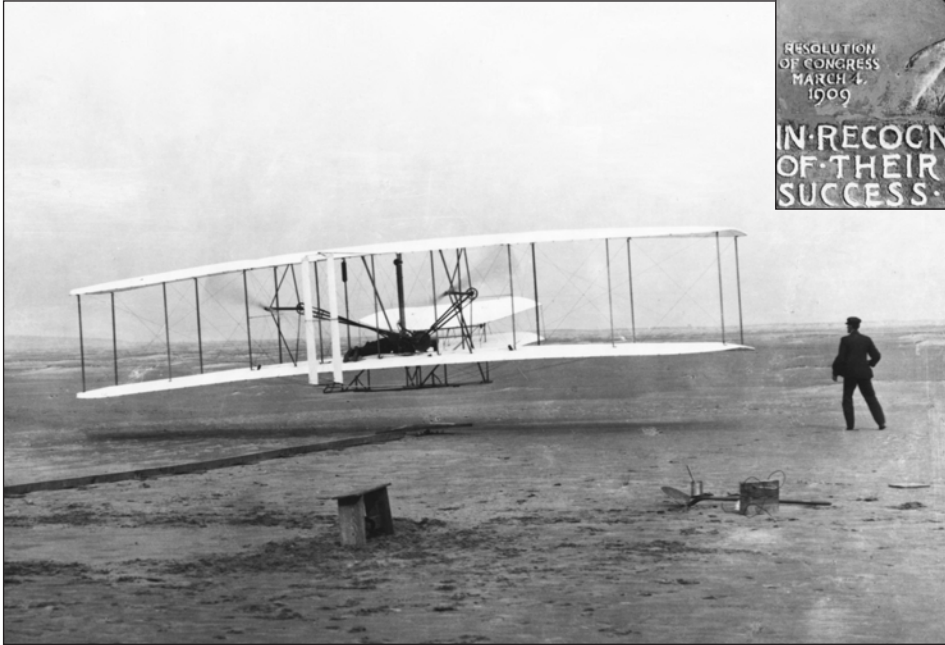
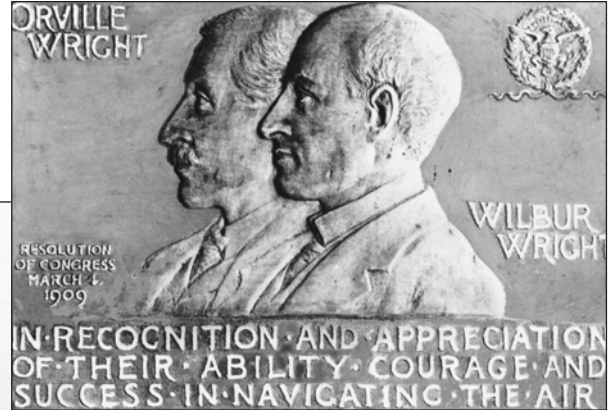
Follow-up Activities

1. **Small Group Activity:** As a group, preview the Ken Burns video "The Brooklyn Bridge." Your teacher or school librarian should be able to help you find this video. Show the video in class. After watching the video, your group should guide the class in discussing the following two questions: "Did the Brooklyn Bridge deserve to have an entire video devoted to it?" and "Why or why not?" What other single achievements of this sort would you like to see described in a video?
2. **Small Group Activity:** Organize a visit to a local factory engaged in the manufacture of some product. Report back to the class on the way the assembly line system is or is not being used in this factory or plant. Use the experience as way to discuss the impact this new method of production, the assembly line, must have had on workers and consumers in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

Lesson 1 — The Triumph of Technology

Illustration 3

Courtesy of the Library of Congress



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustration

1. The famous photo on the left was taken in 1903 in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. Can you explain what the photo shows?
2. By 1903, the Wright brothers had been working for years to develop the airplane. They had often met with frustration along the way. Even after their successful flight, they often had a hard time convincing people of the importance of their invention. Why do you think that was so? What do you think motivated these men to keep striving in the face of such frustrations?
3. People soon realized how important the Wright brothers' achievement was. What also captured people's imaginations was that the Wright brothers were just two individuals who changed the world all on their own. How does this photo itself help to make this point about them? Is it still possible today for an individual to achieve as much working more or less alone as the Wright brothers did? Why or why not?

Follow-up Activities

1. Are there other Wright brothers out there today? Learn more about today's inventors. Try to find out about recent inventors who seem to fit the "lone operator" description that has been used for Orville and Wilbur Wright or for Thomas Edison. Write a report about one of these recent inventors or create a bulletin board display about several of them together. If possible, find images of their inventions to use in your report or bulletin board display.
2. Learn more about the events at Kitty Hawk in 1903 when the Wright brothers tested their flying machine. Pretend you are the only reporter on the spot that day, along with your photographer. You have a real scoop. How will you write the story? Look over newspaper reports on recent breaking stories to get an idea of how to write this kind of report. Now write a story about the Kitty Hawk test. Use the above photo with your story. Tell the world what happened, who the Wright brothers are and why people should care about this event. Post your story on the bulletin board.

“Robber Barons” or “Captains of Industry”? Competing Images of the American Entrepreneur

**OBJECTIVES
FOR THIS LESSON:**

1. Students will understand how the rise of a powerful industrial elite in the late 1800s coincided with the growing sense of unease many Americans felt about urban poverty, disorder and a widening gap between rich and poor.
-

The Rich and Famous and the Teeming Masses

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE ILLUSTRATIONS:

Illustration 1

The inventors of the late 1800s sometimes became rich themselves. But more often than not it was the great businessmen of the day who put the inventions to work and made fortunes off of them. One such giant of industry was Cornelius Vanderbilt, who made his fortune buying up key railroad routes in the Northeast. Like many powerful tycoons of his age, Vanderbilt was a brash, confident, self-assured man eager to show off his wealth in as public a way as possible. This trait can be seen especially in the huge mansions the wealthy built for themselves then. These homes resembled European palaces, befitting families that saw themselves as a new kind of industrial aristocracy. This photo shows the Vanderbilt mansion in New York City.

Illustration 2

In the late 1800s, as enormously wealthy men like Vanderbilt created a new industrial society, the poor remained. If anything, they were more numerous and noticeable than ever as they filled the new cities and went to work in huge factories. Women and children often were forced to toil long hours in poor working conditions for low pay. It was not uncommon for children to be disfigured or killed in factory accidents. The term “sweatshops” came to describe these miserable places of employment. Such conditions led many to believe that society itself was unraveling. The open displays of wealth by the rich and powerful only seemed more shameful to many given the conditions endured by millions of the poor.

Illustration 3

A dangerous gap was growing between rich and poor, one that seemed to threaten the stability of society itself. In that setting, many people looked for ways to reassure themselves about the future. The stories of Horatio Alger undoubtedly provided some reassurance. The stories are based on the idea of America as a land of unlimited opportunity for anyone willing to work hard enough. Being poor was no obstacle to success; effort and character combined could make up for impoverished origins. Many top businessmen of the day came from families that were already well off. But enough had raised themselves from poverty through their own effort to make the “Horatio Alger myth” believable to millions of other Americans.

Illustration 1



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustration

1. In the U.S. in the late 1800s, a new and powerful class of business leaders appeared. Their fortunes came from the huge industrial enterprises they built in those years. One of them was Cornelius Vanderbilt, whose home is shown here. Can you name some of the other powerful business tycoons of those years?
2. Like Vanderbilt, many of these industrial leaders were proud of their wealth and eager to show it off. This Vanderbilt mansion is on New York's Fifth Avenue. What aspects of the home stand out most? What do you think people walking by would have thought of it?
3. The economist Thorstein Veblen used the term "conspicuous consumption" to describe the way the rich of that time liked to display their wealth. What do you think he meant by this phrase? Do you think this mansion is an example of conspicuous consumption?
4. Is it still as common for the wealthiest Americans to display their wealth for all to see as the Vanderbilts did on Fifth Avenue?

Follow-up Activities

1. The late 1800s have come to be known as "The Gilded Age," a term coined by Mark Twain in a book of the same name. Find out more about the term. What does the phrase mean, and why did Twain use it? Now choose at least three images from this booklet you think Twain himself might have used to get at the idea of the Gilded Age. Use the images in a brief presentation to the class on the concept of the Gilded Age. If possible, include some quotations from Mark Twain to help clarify or add to each image you decide to use.
2. Ask your librarian to help you find books with pictures of other homes of the richest families of the late 1800s. Create a bulletin board display called "Homes of the Rich and Famous in the Gilded Age." Write brief paragraphs for the images you find. In what you write, try to point out how the homes expressed a way of life that the rich of the time valued and very much wanted others to see.

Illustration 2



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustration

1. While the rich business leaders of the late 1800s were often admired, a growing number of people viewed these leaders with suspicion and even anger. In part, photos like this one help to explain this anger. How would you describe the scene depicted here?
2. This little girl is working in a textile mill. Children had always worked on farms, in the home and in shops and other settings in the past. But in the late 1800s, concerns about child labor grew rapidly, and this problem came to be seen as a great evil to be ended. Why do you think concerns about child labor were so strong in the late 1800s and early 1900s?
3. Child labor was only one of many big social and economic problems that concerned Americans in those decades. What were some others? Why might these problems have led Americans to regard the wealthiest businessmen with suspicion or anger? Do you think this anger was justified? Why or why not?

Follow-up Activities

1. Photographers Lewis Hine, who took this photo, and Jacob Riis, were pioneers of social documentary. They may have done more than anyone to make Americans aware of the problems of the children in slums and tenements in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Find books or collections of their photographs. (The Library of Congress has many of these photos and can provide you with copies.) Select five to 10 of each of their photos to use in a bulletin board display. Write brief captions for the photos and a narrative that tells the rest of the class about Lewis Hine and Jacob Riis and their work.
2. One book that sparked concern about child labor was John Spargo's *The Bitter Cry of the Children*. Find out more about this book and its author. Prepare a brief talk to the class about the importance of the book, its relation to the industrialists of the Gilded Age and the influence it had on social reform.

Illustration 3



Courtesy of the Library of Congress



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustration

1. In the late 1800s, Americans worried about the growing gap between rich and poor. One writer of stories for boys who helped ease fears about this was Horatio Alger. Covers of two of his novels are displayed here. What do you know about Horatio Alger and his novels?
2. Horatio Alger's stories all had a common theme. That theme helped give people hope for those growing up in dire poverty. What overall message of hope could be found in his novels?
3. Horatio Alger's stories also helped the reputation of the very richest Americans. After all, if success is due to character and hard work, the rich must deserve their wealth. Do you think most Americans accepted that view in the late 1800s? Why or why not?
4. Do you think Horatio Alger's message is mostly true? Or do you think that other factors, such as luck and circumstance, make more of a difference? In other words, is Horatio Alger's message myth or reality?

Follow-up Activities

1. Horatio Alger wrote over 100 novels for boys. His first one, *Ragged Dick*, was published in 1867. Read one Horatio Alger novel and report on it in class. Describe the hero, summarize the plot, and explain the basic moral or message of the story. Offer your own opinion of the novel. Finally, a major focus of your talk should be on whether or not this type of novel could still have meaning today and whether youngsters today would be likely to enjoy the particular novel you read.
2. Make a list of five people currently in the news who you think could be the heroes in a Horatio Alger novel. Be prepared to defend your list in a class discussion about the Horatio Alger myth today.

“Robber Barons” or “Captains of Industry”? Competing Images of the American Entrepreneur

**OBJECTIVES
FOR THIS LESSON:**

1. Students will explore the view that the industrial leaders of the late 1800s and early 1900s were admirable men and heroic builders of a new social order.
-

Captains of an Industrial Giant? ...

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE ILLUSTRATIONS:

Illustration 1

This montage applies the Horatio Alger myth to a real life figure, Cornelius Vanderbilt. The stirring images in it fix points in the basic rags-to-riches-through-hard-work mold. Vanderbilt was born to a poor farming family. He used his first \$100, earned through plowing, to buy a schooner with which he began a ferry business in New York between Manhattan and Staten Island. Next he moved from schooners to steamships, developing freight and passenger service from New York to California and from New York to France. Eventually he moved into railroads, the profits from which helped make him one of the richest men in the country. Stories like Vanderbilt's led millions of admiring Americans to look up to business owners like him as great “Captains of Industry.”

Illustration 2

Two others industrial giants were Andrew Carnegie and J. P. Morgan. Carnegie was also a self-made millionaire who made his fortune in the steel industry. Unlike Vanderbilt, he believed that the main motive for becoming wealthy should be the betterment of the human race. In his later years, he gave away much of his money to found libraries and finance many other charitable works. J. P. Morgan was not another “rags-to-riches” success story. His family had a great deal of money, which he inherited. But he made millions more in the banking and financial world of Wall Street. Men like Carnegie and Morgan were often thought to be every bit as powerful as presidents.

Illustration 3

This photo shows an elderly Thomas Edison flanked by auto pioneer Henry Ford, on the left, and tire magnate Harvey Firestone, on the right. At one time, Ford was actually the chief engineer for the Edison Illuminating Company. It was 1903 when he established his own Ford Motor Company. Harvey Firestone had been inspired by Edison's experiments extracting rubber from plants. Firestone's use of rubber for automobile tires helped bring another huge industry into being. This photo of these three men connects the idea of the lone inventor with that of the self-made entrepreneur. It epitomizes the “can-do” spirit of these giants of industry — and of America itself — in the first half of the 20th century.

Illustration 1



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustration

1. Some people might describe Cornelius Vanderbilt's life as a "Horatio Alger tale." That seems to be the message of this poster illustrating four key stages of that life. From the scene above, can you guess the kind of family Vanderbilt grew up in and the first work he did?
2. Vanderbilt used \$100 earned through plowing to buy a schooner and start a ferry business in New York. Later, he got into the steamship business. In what industry did he make his real fortune?
3. The words at the bottom of the poster read "Representative Americans." Do you think this is a fair way to describe the life of someone like Vanderbilt? Why or why not?
4. Some would say this poster is a highly idealized version of Vanderbilt's life. What do you think they mean by this? Do you agree? Why or why not?

Follow-up Activities

1. Read a biography of Cornelius Vanderbilt. Prepare a brief talk to the class on this famous business leader of the 1800s. In your talk, describe Vanderbilt's life and his key accomplishments. Then write a report in which you give your opinion as to whether or not Vanderbilt's overall impact on society was positive or negative.
2. Choose a famous contemporary business leader. Learn more about him or her. If possible while doing your research, clip photos or illustrations of this person, or make your own drawings. Create a biographical poster of this person similar to the one shown here of Cornelius Vanderbilt. Make sure the poster contains what you feel ought to be the appropriate "message" about this person's life. Share your poster with the class.

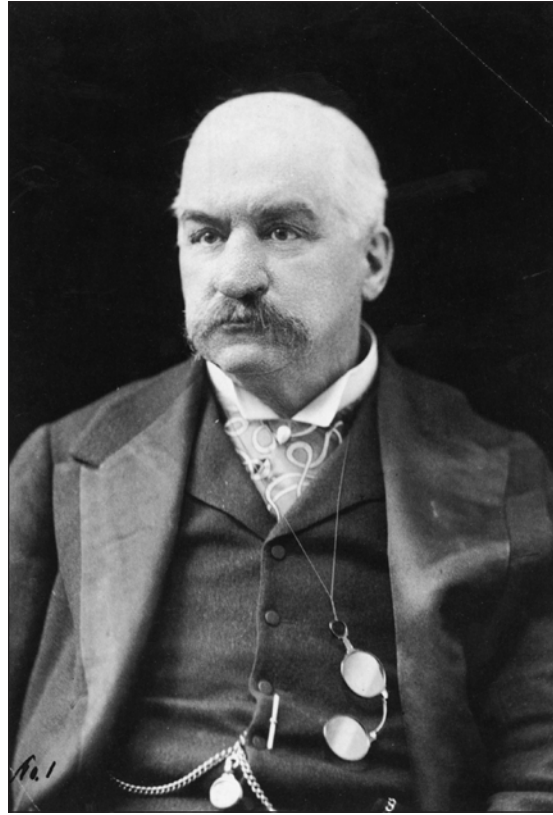
Illustration 2



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustration

1. Here are two other important business leaders of the late 1800s. Can you identify them?
2. Andrew Carnegie and J. P. Morgan each dominated one key sector of the U.S. economy. Can you explain which sectors these were?
3. Carnegie believed in what he called the “gospel of wealth.” According to this outlook, it was good for a man to become rich, but wealth also placed special obligations on him. Can you explain what those obligations were? From what you know about Carnegie, did he live up to this philosophy?
4. You might see these images as simple, rather boring photos of two individuals. But some would say that they actually convey a very definite idea of these men as important, powerful, confident and dignified. Do you agree? What features of each photo might lead some to react to them this way?



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Follow-up Activities

1. Read more about Andrew Carnegie. Based on what you learn, react to this photo of him in two different ways. First pretend you are Carnegie himself. Write a paragraph about the photo of “yourself,” and explain what you do or do not like about it. Next, pretend you are a union organizer for a steel workers’ union at the time. Write a paragraph as if you are this union organizer, and explain what you do or do not like about the photo.
2. In 1901, Andrew Carnegie sold his steel company to J. P. Morgan’s U.S. Steel for a whopping \$447 million. When Carnegie told Morgan he regretted not holding out for \$100 million more, Morgan is said to have responded, “Andy, I would have paid it.” Imagine it’s 1901 and you are a reporter who has been granted an exclusive interview with these two men. What questions will you ask them? Prepare a list of questions. Then, pretend you are Carnegie and Morgan, in turn, and respond to these questions. Share your “interview” with the class.

Illustration 3



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustration

1. Here are another three men who were often thought of as giants of the new industrial America of the early 1900s. In the center is inventor Thomas Edison. On the left is the man who dominated the automobile industry of the early 1900s. Can you name him?
2. More than anyone else, Ford helped to make the car available not just to the wealthy, but to millions of ordinary consumers. Can you explain how?
3. On the right is Harvey Firestone. Can you explain his contribution to the development of American industry?
4. These three men were close friends. In a way, their friendship illustrates the linkage between science, technological change and business. Can you name some of the industries in the late 1800s and early 1900s in which this linkage resulted in the biggest changes? In what industries today do you think this linkage is most important?

Follow-up Activities

1. Small Group Activity: In this lesson we've learned about some of the famous industrialists of the late 1800s and early 1900s — Cornelius Vanderbilt, Andrew Carnegie, J. P. Morgan and Henry Ford. Another of them is John D. Rockefeller. Read more about these men. As we've seen, some people admired these men as great "Captains of Industry." Others feared them and called them "Robber Barons." Discuss the meaning of these two labels. Then, as a group, hold a discussion with the class to decide which term best describes each of these five businessmen.
2. Read more about the same five men listed in the first activity above. Of these men, which do you believe had the biggest impact on the future development of the United States? Write a report in which you state your opinion. Be sure to defend your opinion with solid evidence.

“Robber Barons” or “Captains of Industry”? Competing Images of the American Entrepreneur

**OBJECTIVES
FOR THIS LESSON:**

1. Students will explore alternative images of the industrial leaders of the late 1800s and early 1900s in which these men were seen as predatory, exploitative and responsible for the central evils of the day.
-

... Or Predatory Robber Barons?

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE ILLUSTRATIONS:

Illustration 1

Millions of Americans in the late 1800s and early 1900s admired powerful business leaders as beneficial “Captains of Industry.” Yet many others expressed intense hatred for these men, blaming them for most of the ills accompanying the rise of an urban and industrial America. The term “Robber Barons” captured the sense of these men as no better than thieves and as no more deserving of wealth and power as the feudal lords of the Middle Ages. This editorial cartoon conveys exactly that view. In it, four rich men (Cyrus Field, Jay Gould, Cornelius Vanderbilt and Russell Sage) rest comfortably with their money on the backs of millions of workers. Meanwhile, the stormy seas of economic hard times threatens to sweep those workers away while leaving the rich untouched.

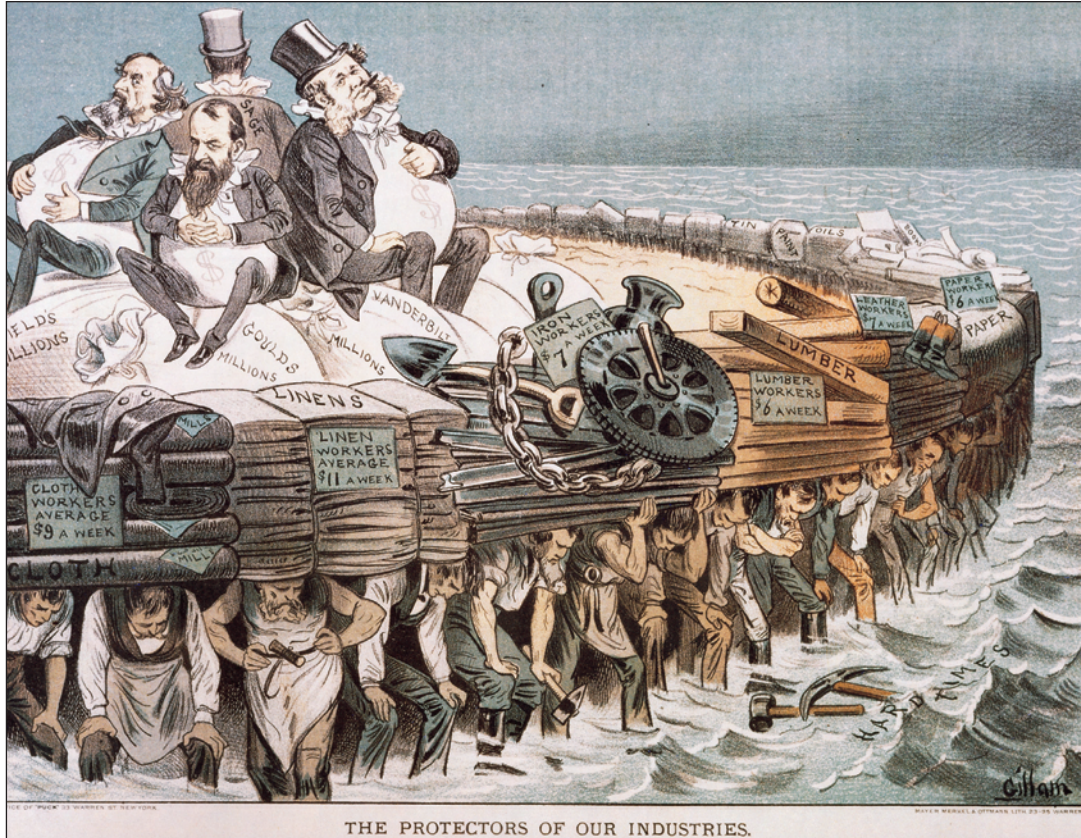
Illustration 2

The power of the Robber Barons to exploit their workers was one theme stressed by their critics. Another had to do with their political power. This cartoon shows John D. Rockefeller’s Standard Oil as a giant octopus, with its tentacles wrapped around the steel, copper and shipping industries, as well as a state house and the U.S. Capitol. One tentacle reaches for the White House itself. Many people believed that business tycoons like Rockefeller were powerful enough to undermine the very institutions of representative democracy. In a speech in 1890, radical reformer Mary Lease said, “It is no longer a government of the people, by the people and for the people, but a government of Wall Street, by Wall Street and for Wall Street.”

Illustration 3

This cartoon uses the myth of the Pied Piper to express something else about the Robber Barons that annoyed the critics. This was the fact that so many other Americans continued to admire these industrialists. The Pied Piper here is J. P. Morgan, someone whom millions of Americans saw as a protector of financial order, a man who had actually helped bail the government out of financial difficulty. The cartoon shows people of various professions and nationalities following Morgan. The words beneath it proclaim, “His music enchants the world.” As the cartoon suggests, the debate about these industrial giants was not settled in the late 1800s. Historians have still not settled it to this day.

Illustration 1



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustration

1. This editorial cartoon shows four men seated on some bags of money. How can you tell from the cartoon that these four are all wealthy and powerful businessmen?
2. Countless workers are protecting the four men from an angry sea. But this is not meant literally as the sea. What does this sea actually represent?
3. The cartoon suggests that the effect of economic hard times on America's industrial workers is very different from the effect on the owners of the industries. Can you explain? Do you agree with the cartoon's point? Why or why not?
4. The cartoon is a good example of one commonly held view of the rich business leaders of the late 1800s. Those holding this view often referred to those leaders as "Robber Barons." Why do you think this became such a commonly used label? Was it a fair label? Why or why not?

Follow-up Activities

1. This cartoon's point of view seems close to a Marxist or socialist view of an industrial capitalist society. Read Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto*. As you do, keep the above cartoon in mind. Then write a brief essay about the *Manifesto* and this cartoon. In your essay, summarize the key ideas of the *Manifesto* in this way: First, describe the ideas in the above cartoon that are also developed in the *Communist Manifesto*. Secondly, describe any ideas in the cartoon that are not expressed in the *Manifesto*.
2. This cartoon first appeared in the illustrated weekly *Puck* in February 1883. Read more about the early 1880s. Imagine you are an editor of *Puck*. Write an editorial meant to reinforce and further explain the point the cartoon makes.

Illustration 2



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustration

1. This cartoon uses an octopus to symbolize a powerful corporation that by the late 1800s had nearly total control over its entire industry. Can you name that corporation and the man who owned and developed it?
2. At one point, Standard Oil was a complete monopoly. What is a monopoly?
3. In the cartoon, the Standard Oil octopus has its tentacles around several other businesses, a state capitol and the U.S. Capitol. And one tentacle is reaching for the White House. What points about Standard Oil's power is the cartoon making by showing this octopus with its tentacles wrapped around these industries and political buildings?
4. Do you think the power of a corporation like Standard Oil could ever be as great as this cartoon suggests? Why or why not?

Follow-up Activities

1. The octopus has often been used in political cartoons as a symbol of some enormously powerful institution or leader out to do harm. How might the octopus in the above cartoon be used today? Trace the outline of this octopus. Then use it as a symbol in a cartoon of your own about some powerful agency, government, social institution or individual today.
2. As president, Theodore Roosevelt claimed to champion society as a whole in his efforts to check the power of big business monopolies. But did he? Some would say he did break up certain monopolies or trusts whenever he thought their power would harm the country. But others say he did not do enough to control the trusts and other powerful corporations. Read more about Theodore Roosevelt. Pretend you are Roosevelt and write an imaginary diary entry about this cartoon as if you just saw it in today's newspaper. As a class, share some of these entries in a discussion about Roosevelt and his attitudes toward the powerful corporations of his day.

Illustration 3



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustration

1. This cartoon uses the myth of the Pied Piper to make another kind of point about the Robber Barons. Can you summarize the myth of the Pied Piper? What famous businessman is portrayed as the Pied Piper in this cartoon?
2. The cartoon shows various groups of people happily following Morgan. Thinking about the Pied Piper myth and the words shown here, what point do you think the cartoonist is making about J. P. Morgan and the public's view of him?
3. The cartoon suggests that many Americans still admired great industrialists like Morgan, despite harsh views of them by people such as this artist. Why do you think people held such strongly opposed views about these business leaders? Do you think Americans have these same mixed views about business leaders today? How do you view these figures of the late 1800s and early 1900s? Were they evil Robber Barons, great Captains of Industry or something in between?

Follow-up Activities

1. In 1925, President Calvin Coolidge said this:

So long as wealth is made the means and not the end, we need not greatly fear it. And there never was a time when wealth was so generally regarded as a means, or so little regarded as an end, as today. Just a little time ago we read ... that two leaders of American business, whose efforts at accumulation had been most astonishingly successful, had given fifty or sixty million dollars as endowments to educational works. That was real news. It was characteristic of our American experience with men of large resources. They use their power to serve, not themselves and their own families, but the public. I feel sure that the coming generations, which will benefit by those endowments, will not be easily convinced that they have suffered greatly because of these particular accumulations of wealth.

Write an essay responding to these words, to one of the cartoons for this lesson and to at least one other illustration from this booklet.

Answers to Factual Questions

(Answers provided only to questions
requiring a single correct answer)

Lesson 1

Illustration 1 Question 1: Thomas Edison
Question 2: Phonograph, electric light, etc.
Question 3: Alexander Graham Bell

Illustration 2 Question 1: The Brooklyn Bridge
Question 3: The assembly line greatly increased production time and reduced production costs for many goods. It helped make many goods such as cars affordable for millions.

Illustration 3 Question 1: The Wright brothers testing the first airplane

Lesson 2

Illustration 1 Question 1: John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, Jay Gould, J. P. Morgan, etc.

Illustration 2 (no fact questions)

Illustration 3 Question 2: That even the very poor could succeed with good character and hard work

Lesson 3

Illustration 1 Question 2: Railroads

Illustration 2 Question 1: Andrew Carnegie, J. P. Morgan
Question 2: Carnegie, steel; Morgan, banking and finance
Question 3: Carnegie believed the rich should give all their money away through charitable activities.

Illustration 3 Question 1: Henry Ford
Question 2: It was Ford's assembly line production process that brought the cost of a car down to where millions could afford them.
Question 3: He developed the use of rubber for tires.

Lesson 4

Illustration 1 (no fact questions)

Illustration 2 Question 1: Standard Oil, John D. Rockefeller
Question 2: A monopoly is a business that is the only seller of a particular good.

Illustration 3 Question 1: J. P. Morgan

