



“THE AMERICAN ECONOMY WAS LINKED BY RAILROADS, FUELED BY OIL AND BUILT BY STEEL.”

Cornelius Vanderbilt, John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, J.P. Morgan, Henry Ford – their names are synonymous with innovation, big business and the American Dream. These leaders sparked incredible advances in technology while struggling to consolidate their industries and rise to the top of the business world. *The Men Who Built America*™ chronicles the connections between these iconic businessmen and explores the way they shaped the country, transforming the U.S. into a global superpower in just 50 years.

Tracing their roles in the oil, steel, railroad, auto and financial industries, this series uses stunning CGI and little-known stories to examine the lives of these iconic tycoons. How did these leaders advance progress, and what were the costs and consequences of American industrial growth? What role did everyday Americans play in this growth, and how were their voices heard? This series is an excellent companion for course units on business, American history and the Industrial Revolution.

CURRICULUM LINKS

The Men Who Built America would be useful for American history, politics and social studies courses. It is recommended for high school students. Due to some intense content, we recommend that teachers watch this program before recommending it to students.

EPISODE 1: A NEW WAR BEGINS

As the nation attempts to rebuild following the destruction of the Civil War, Cornelius Vanderbilt is the first to see the need for unity to regain America's stature in the world. Vanderbilt makes his mark in shipping and then the railroad industry. Railroads stitch together the nation, stimulating the economy by making it easier to move goods across the country. But Vanderbilt faces intense competition early on, showing that captains of industry will always be challenged by new innovators and mavericks.

KEY TERMS TO DEFINE

ARCHETYPE, ENTREPRENEUR, INFRASTRUCTURE, INGENUITY, INNOVATION

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Some may have called the United States a “failed experiment” after the Civil War. Why?
2. What role did Vanderbilt play in helping the country rebuild after the Civil War?
3. What is a hostile takeover? How did Vanderbilt deal with this kind of competition?
4. What major industries emerged in the decades after the Civil War?

RELATED VIDEO CLIP

Have students watch this clip for additional background information and discuss the role of Vanderbilt in helping stimulate the U.S. economy: history.com/shows/men-who-built-america/videos/the-men-who-built-america-the-rise-of-cornelius-vanderbilt

ACTIVITY

Thomas Nast created cartoons criticizing the robber barons for their role conflicts in the railroad industry wars.

[Click here to view one of these cartoons.](#) What does the cartoon reveal about the railroad wars? Alternately, have students search for another Nast cartoon and analyze it.

EPISODE 2: OIL STRIKE

Vanderbilt expands his enterprises, realizing that oil is the nation's next crucial commodity. The demand for oil is high and Vanderbilt knows that it will be an important item for his trains to transport. He turns to a young oilman from California named John D. Rockefeller to make a deal that will work for both businessmen, but rivalries emerge between them. Rockefeller's Standard Oil has become one of the nation's first monopolies. A financial panic in 1873 shows that the American economy is on shaky ground even as it expands.

KEY TERMS TO DEFINE

ETHIC, MODERNIZATION, MONOPOLY, REFINERY, REVENUE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to "beat the odds," and how is John Rockefeller an example of this concept?
2. What is refining oil, and why was it so important when oil first became a popular commodity?
3. Standard Oil was one of the nation's first monopolies. What is a monopoly? Why do you think leaders like Rockefeller wanted to shut out competition?
4. What was the Panic of 1873?

RELATED VIDEO CLIP

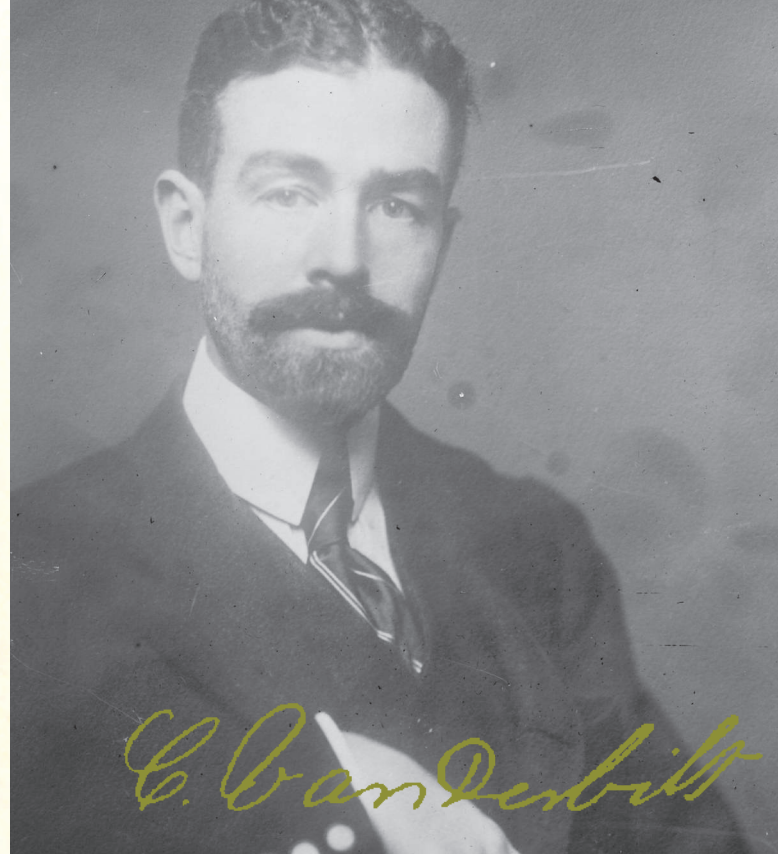
Watch this video clip to learn more about Standard Oil: history.com/shows/men-who-built-america/videos/rockefellers-standard-oil

ACTIVITY

In this episode, viewers learn about the Panic of 1873. Research this economic crisis and write a short essay about the causes and consequences.

EPISODE 3: A RIVALRY IS BORN

Andrew Carnegie is an immigrant from Scotland who arrives in the U.S. with his parents and starts working at age 12. He finds a patron in railroad executive Tom Scott who teaches him about the business. Scott hires him to build a bridge over the Mississippi River to link East and West. Carnegie agrees even though the project carries risk. He finds his answer in steel.



The bridge opens in 1874. Before Carnegie realizes the full potential of steel, his mentor Scott dies in a state of humiliation over the success of John D. Rockefeller's oil pipeline. Carnegie vows to have his revenge and best Rockefeller. With the steel industry thriving, U.S. cities start to grow. But can Carnegie stay at the top of his game?

KEY TERMS TO DEFINE

CAPITALIZE, DECIMATE, OMINOUS, SURGE, UNPRECEDENTED

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was the Bessemer steel process and how did it transform the construction industry?
2. Why were infrastructure projects such as bridges and roads so important to American growth?
3. Why do you think Carnegie and Rockefeller became rivals? What did they have in common and what divided them?

RELATED VIDEO

Watch this video to learn more about Andrew Carnegie's rise to prominence: history.com/shows/men-who-built-america/videos/the-men-who-built-america-andrew-carnegie

ACTIVITY

Andrew Carnegie published an essay entitled "Wealth" (later titled "The Gospel of Wealth") in which he discussed his views on capitalism. Read an excerpt from this essay at historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5766 and write a response paper. What does Carnegie say about the responsibilities of wealth?



EPISODE 4: BLOOD IS SPILLED

Carnegie hires Henry Frick to help him achieve his goal of dominating the steel industry and besting Rockefeller. The partnership seems promising, but Frick is pushing workers to a breaking point. Meanwhile, the Johnstown Flood of 1889 leaves 2,000 people dead, and Carnegie's South Fork Fishing & Hunting Club faces blame. Worker unrest culminates in a massive strike at the Homestead Steel plant in 1892. Violence ensues when Frick calls in the Pinkerton security agency. The strike is a major turning point in American labor history, showing how workers would fight for fair wages and conditions when faced with injustice. Carnegie is determined to make up for these scars on his reputation.

KEY TERMS TO DEFINE

ANARCHIST, INDUSTRIAL, MAGNATE, MERCENARY, PROGRESSIVE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What caused the Johnstown Flood? What were some of the outcomes of this disaster? What role did the American Red Cross play?
2. Do you think Henry Frick was a good leader? Why or why not?
3. Why did workers strike at the Homestead Steel plant? Why was the strike an important turning point in American history?
4. Do you think Carnegie was responsible for the Johnstown Flood and the Homestead strike? Why or why not?

RELATED VIDEO

Watch this video about the Homestead Strike to learn more about this event: history.com/shows/men-who-built-america/videos/homestead-strike

ACTIVITY

The Johnstown Flood was one of the worst disasters in American history. Read these stories from the New York Times: johnstownpa.com/History/hist30.html. Research the flood online and write a short essay about the flood and its outcomes, including the role of the Red Cross.

EPISODE 5: A NEW RIVAL EMERGES

While Carnegie and Rockefeller continue to battle, J.P. Morgan arrives on the scene and establishes a bank in New York City that has one goal: to further the technological advancements of America through finance. As he builds his empire and consolidates industries, Morgan decides to take a big risk. He enlists inventor Thomas Edison to help bring electricity to every home and business in the country. Rockefeller continues to expand his Standard Oil Company and aims to keep kerosene as the dominant resource powering electricity. Regardless of these competitive dynamics, American infrastructure is growing and cities are on the rise.

KEY TERMS TO DEFINE

COMPENSATION, EMPIRE, LIABILITY, PATENT, RESOLVE, VOLTAGE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What were some of the challenges Carnegie faced? Do you think he could have avoided these difficulties?
2. What were J.P. Morgan's major areas of business? Why was he such an important figure in U.S. history?
3. What role does risk play in big business? What kinds of risks did Carnegie and Rockefeller take?

RELATED VIDEO

View this short video to learn more about J.P. Morgan and the rise of American finance: history.com/shows/men-who-built-america/videos/the-rise-of-j-p-morgan?m=5189719baf036&s=All&f=1&free=false

ACTIVITY

View Thomas Edison's patent application for the lightbulb at the National Archives Our Documents site: ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=46 What does this letter reveal about the patent application process?

EPISODE 6: OWNING IT ALL

With an investment from Morgan, the Edison Electric Company is created and begins wiring homes in New York. A rival, Nikola Tesla, soon emerges with a different technology for electric light. A battle between Alternating Current (AC) and Direct Current (DC) power ensues. Morgan eventually buys out Edison and forms General Electric which adopts AC power,

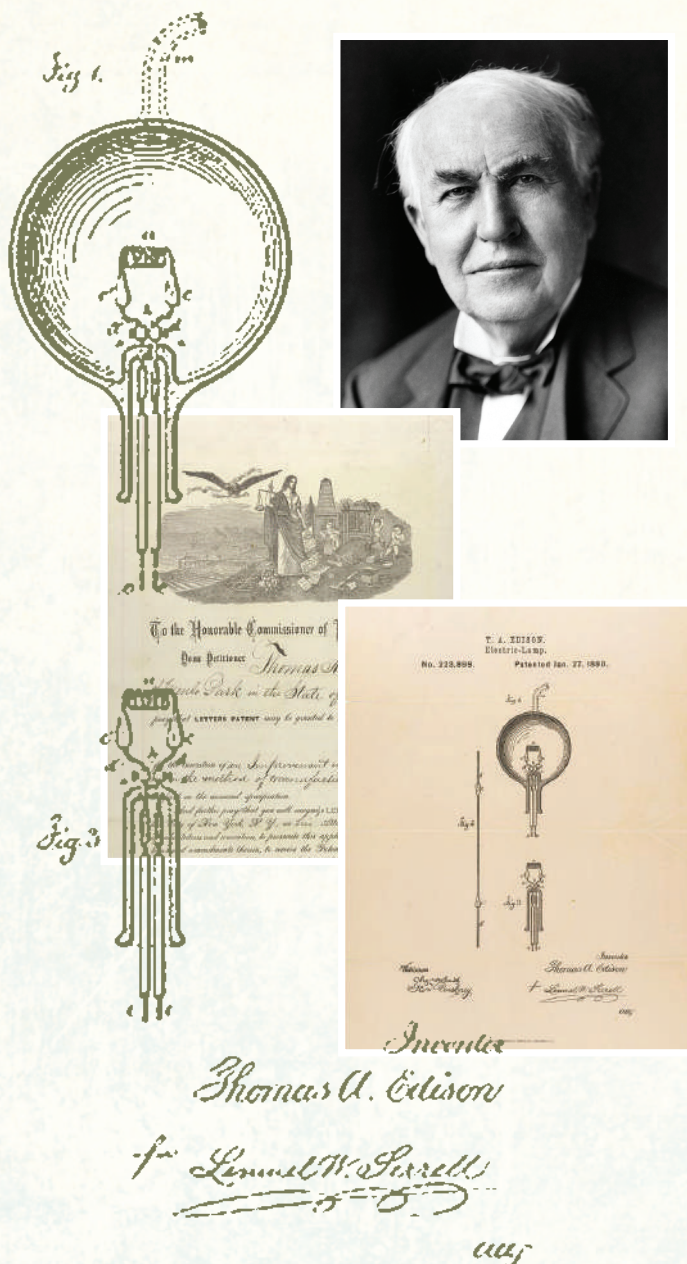
setting the stage for the next several decades of electric power. Meanwhile, there is increasing unrest among American workers as the gap between the rich and the poor grows.

KEY TERMS TO DEFINE

BEDROCK, HORSEPOWER, PRIVATE SECTOR, STREAMLINE, VIABLE, VULNERABILITY, WATERSHED,

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between AC and DC power?
2. What do you think of Morgan's decision to buy out Thomas Edison? Do you think this decision was fair to Edison?
3. Why was J.P. Morgan's ability to loan funds to the federal government so important? Do you agree with one commentator that this was an "act of nationalism"?
4. What is "Morganization"? Why was this approach an important and notable feature of the American economy?



RELATED VIDEO

View this video to learn more about Thomas Edison's experiments with electricity: [history.com/shows/men-who-built-america/videos/the-rise-of-thomas-edison](https://www.history.com/shows/men-who-built-america/videos/the-rise-of-thomas-edison)

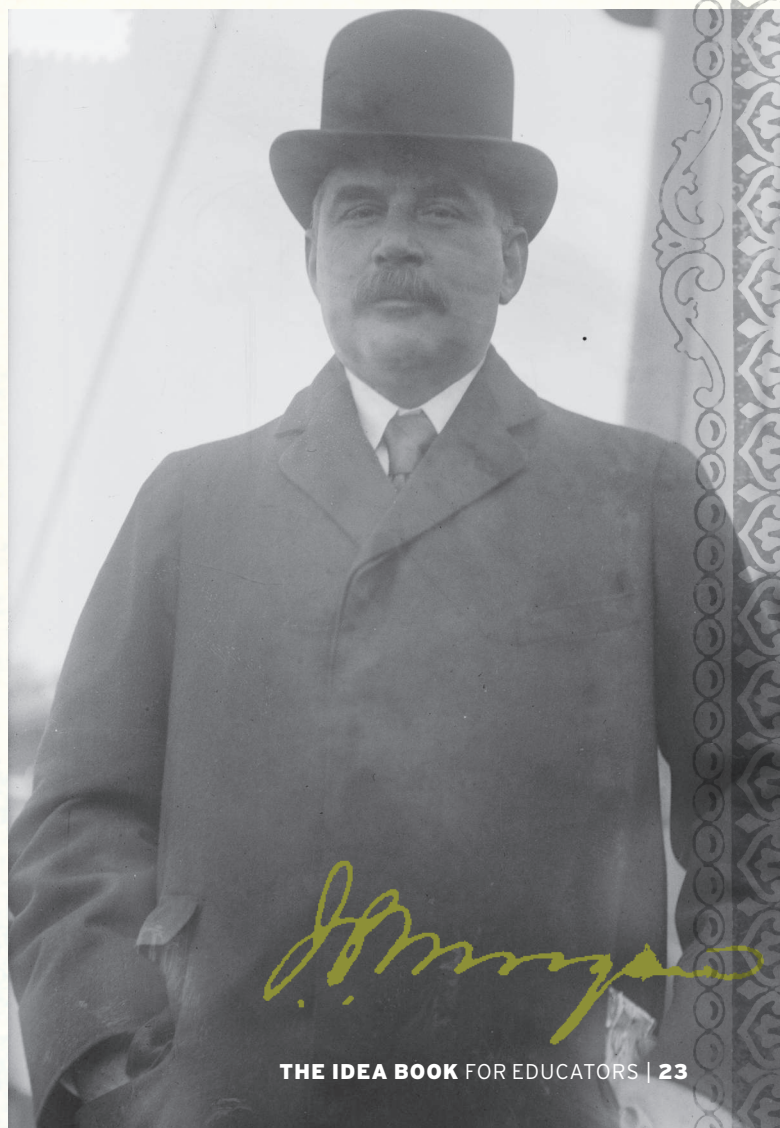
ACTIVITY

View this photo gallery of the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago: [fieldmuseum.org/about/multimedia/opening-vaults-wonders-1893-worlds-fair-photo-gallery](https://www.fieldmuseum.org/about/multimedia/opening-vaults-wonders-1893-worlds-fair-photo-gallery)

After doing your own research create a one-sheet or short presentation about the World's Fair and its importance in U.S. history.

EPISODE 7: TAKING THE WHITE HOUSE

Vanderbilt, Rockefeller, Carnegie and Morgan have gone unmonitored for decades, but American politicians are about to change that. They want to guard against monopolies and an unbalanced use of power. The men, some lifelong enemies, come together with a play to gain influence with the White House. Their candidate, William McKinley, wins the White House and passes legislation favorable to big business. Morgan and Carnegie create U.S. Steel, the first billion-dollar company in the U.S. while Rockefeller takes control of 90 percent of North American oil.



KEY TERMS TO DEFINE

ANTI-TRUST, CAPITAL, ELITE, LUCRATIVE, NICHE, PROSPERITY, RUTHLESS

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why were American workers upset at the time of the 1896 election? How did William Jennings Bryan attempt to address some of their concerns?
2. Why did the business tycoons put their support behind William McKinley? Were they successful?
3. What does “anti-trust” mean? Do you agree with the strategy of breaking up businesses that become very dominant in one industry?
4. Watch this video to learn more about the rise of American industrial tycoons: history.com/shows/men-who-built-america/videos/the-men-who-built-america-from-rich-to-rich

ACTIVITY

The Sherman Anti-Trust Act was designed to limit monopolies by prohibiting large trust companies. View this Act at the National Archives Our Documents site: ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=51

What does it say about monopolies, and what punishments did it suggest for violators?

EPISODE 8: THE NEW MACHINE

After McKinley is assassinated, Theodore Roosevelt becomes president and quickly passes a series of regulations increasing oversight of American business. Henry Ford devises the plan for a gas-powered car, and he launches the assembly line as an innovative method of production. He targets the middle class with his Model T and changes the landscape of America.

The Panama Canal opens up new trade routes. Rockefeller is put on trial for anti-trust violations. He loses in court and his company, Standard Oil, is one of the first monopolies broken up by the U.S. government. J.P. Morgan helps to establish the Federal Reserve and cements his legacy as the father of modern capitalism. He and other big business leaders become major philanthropists. As the U.S. Army sets sail for Europe in World War I, one thing is clear...these men didn't discover America, they built it.

KEY TERMS TO DEFINE

DURABLE, MONOPOLY, PHILANTHROPY, SUPERPOWER, UTILITARIAN

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why was the election of President Theodore Roosevelt so significant? What were some of the major changes he made?
2. What were some of Henry Ford's key innovations?
3. Why was the Panama Canal such an important project?
4. What is philanthropy? Do you think all business leaders are obligated to also be philanthropists?

RELATED VIDEO

View this video to learn more about President Theodore Roosevelt's role in limited big industry: history.com/shows/men-who-built-america/videos/theodore-roosevelt-vs-big-industry?m=5189719baf036&s=All&f=1&free=false

View this clip to learn about Henry Ford's rise: history.com/shows/men-who-built-america/videos/henry-fords-motor-company?m=5189719baf036&s=All&f=1&free=false

ACTIVITY

The Child Labor Act of 1916 was developed to eliminate the abuse of children in the workforce. View the Child Labor Act and read the text, and also view related photos by Lewis Hine linked on the National Archives Our Documents site: ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=59

Write an essay or op-ed about child labor violations and the importance of this Act.



RELATED WEBSITES

Learn more about the business leaders featured in *The Men Who Built America*™, watch related video and more: history.com/shows/men-who-built-america

Test your knowledge and take *The Men Who Built America* Trivia Quiz: history.com/shows/men-who-built-america/interactives/men-who-built-america-trivia-quiz

Background information about the Industrial Revolution in the U.S.: history.com/topics/industrial-revolution

Essay by T.J. Stiles/Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History: "Robber Barons or Captains of Industry?": gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/gilded-age/essays/robber-barons-or-captains-industry

RELATED BOOKS

These books are recommended for teachers and advanced students interested in learning more about these topics for research papers or classroom projects.

Chernow, Ron. *The House of Morgan: An American Banking Dynasty and the Rise of Modern Finance*. (Grove Press, 2010).

Jonnes, Jill. *Empires of Light: Edison, Tesla, Westinghouse, and the Race to Electrify the World*. (Random House, 2004).

Morris, Charles. *The Tycoons: How Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, Jay Gould, and J.P. Morgan Invented the American Supereconomy*. (Holt, 2006).

Watts, Steven. *The People's Tycoon: Henry Ford and the American Century*. (Vintage, 2006).

