

# Captains of Industry or Robber Barons?

## Document-Based Question

**Directions: Please complete the following:**

1. Using the accompanying *Documents A-F*, answer the questions for each.
2. Decide which position you would support, that these men were *Captains of Industry* (who made an overall positive contribution to the United States), or *Robber Barons* (who through unethical means, made themselves rich at the expense of others).
3. Choose *ONE SUPPORTING ARGUMENT* for your position and write a paragraph which includes
  - a. Topic Sentence
  - b. 2 pieces of evidence
  - c. Commentary
4. Label these elements in your paragraph.

**EXAMPLE: Captains of Industry**

Industrial leaders of the 20<sup>th</sup> century such as John Rockefeller helped shape the United States into the most advanced and powerful country in the world (Topic Sentence). Between 1860 and 1890, the U.S. Patent Office issued over 400,000 patents (evidence: HW). By recognizing the value of these new inventions and awarding patents, the U.S. government encouraged the growth and spread of new technologies, while visionaries like Rockefeller and Henry Ford set the spark for the spirit of innovation that continues to power the United States today (commentary). In the words of one historian, Americans like Rockefeller “were innovators, thinkers, planners, and bold entrepreneurs who imposed upon American industry a more rational and efficient pattern... Had it not been for these captains of industry, the free world might have lost the first world war, and most certainly have lost the second” (Evidence: Document E). It is America’s industrial might and spirit of innovation that have made it a world power, a force for good, and a model of technological progress and economic success (commentary).

## Document A

Source: Library of Congress, *Puck*, 1883.



THE PROTECTORS OF OUR INDUSTRIES.

### Document Analysis

1. In the cartoon above, what do the men at the top of the image represent? What are they sitting on?
2. In the same cartoon, what do the men at the bottom of the page represent? What are they trying to do?
3. What are some of the industries depicted in the cartoon?
4. What point is the artist trying to make through this cartoon?

## Document B

**Source:** Andrew Carnegie, *The Gospel of Wealth* (1889)

“Thus the problem of Rich and Poor is to be solved. The laws of accumulation will be left free; the laws of distribution free. Individualism will continue, but the millionaire will be a trustee for the poor; entrusted for a season with a great part of the increased wealth of the community, but administering it for the community far better than it could or would have done itself...

“This, then, is held to be the duty of the man of wealth: First, to set an example of modest, unostentatious living, shunning display or extravagance; ... and, after doing so, to consider all surplus revenues which come to him simply as trust funds, which he is called upon to administer... to produce the most beneficial results for the community – the man of wealth thus becoming the sole agent and trustee for his poorer brethren, bringing to their service his superior wisdom, experience and ability to administer, doing for them better than they would or could do for themselves.”

### Document Analysis

1. What do you think Carnegie means by “the problem of the Rich and the Poor”?
2. In this quote from *The Gospel of Wealth*, what example should the “man of wealth” set?
3. According to this excerpt, how should the “man of wealth” administer the trust fund of his surplus revenues?
4. According to Carnegie, what does the “man of wealth” have, that his ‘poorer brethren’ don’t (besides money)?
5. Does this quote indicate that Carnegie is a Captain of Industry, or a Robber Baron? Why?

## Document C

Source: "Dogs of War Unleashed." *St. Paul Daily Globe*, July 7, 1892

"The riot today [at the Carnegie Iron and Steel Company at Homestead] was the culmination of the troubles which have been brewing at Homestead for the past month. The Carnegie company submitted a [pay]scale to govern their workmen in the steel plants, and announced that it was their ultimatum. The scale made a sweeping reduction in the wages of skilled men, and it was officially announced that unless the terms were complied with before July 1 the places of the workmen would be filled by others.

"This was followed by a refusal on the part of the company to recognize the [union], or to confer with any committee of the workmen for any purpose short of an acceptance of the terms offered. The men stated that they would never submit to the proposed reduction, and announced their determination to resist any effort on the part of the Carnegie company to start up their plants with non-union men. As both sides were determined, both proceeded to prepare for the contest which culminated in the deeds of violence and bloodshed that were witnessed today...

"By 4 o'clock in the morning an effort was made to land the detectives [called in to break the strike], but the strikers met them and a fierce battle was precipitated, both sides exchanging a heavy volley of shots. The detectives were all armed with Winchester rifles... The Pinkerton men were determined to land, and they poured volley after volley into the ranks of the strikers, many of whom were stricken down by the bullets, some of them being fatally injured and others killed outright..."

### Document Analysis

1. Why did the workers go on strike? What happened to the union's power of collective bargaining?
2. What was threatened if the workers did not accept the terms? What would happen to their jobs?
3. Although the degree of violence at Homestead was not usual, strikes and labor conflict were common during Carnegie's time. What generalization can be made about the relationship between workers and management during this time period?
4. Does this article portray Carnegie as a Captain of Industry or a Robber Baron? How does it portray his workers?

## Document D

Source: Horace Taylor, *The Verdict*, September 25, 1899



THE TRUST GIANTS POINT OF VIEW.  
"WHAT A FUNNY LITTLE GOVERNMENT!"

### Document Analysis

1. According to the cartoon, who controls the national government?
2. Who represents the trusts in this cartoon? What industry did he dominate?
3. What are some of the symbols of industry represented in this cartoon?
4. The title of this cartoon is "The Trust Giants Point of View". Describe their point of view.
5. Does this cartoon identify American entrepreneurs as Captains of Industry or Robber Barons?

## Document E

Source: [www.dcte.udel.edu/hlp/resources/nation/interpret\\_narratives.pdf](http://www.dcte.udel.edu/hlp/resources/nation/interpret_narratives.pdf)

### Historian B 1953

“Much of the blame heaped on the captains of industry in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century is unwarranted. Although people like Rockefeller used methods that were ethically questionable, the kind of monopolistic control that they exercised was a natural response to the cutthroat competition of the period and reflected the trend toward business consolidation in all industrial nations. The captains of industry like Rockefeller who were innovators, thinkers, planners, and bold entrepreneurs who imposed upon American industry a more rational and efficient pattern. They also created a model of philanthropy for all to follow. Had it not been for these captains of industry, the free world might have lost the first world war, and most certainly have lost the second.”

### Document Analysis

1. What view does Historian B have of Gilded Age entrepreneurs? How does he/she describe them?
2. Does the historian admit that the methods of the businessmen of the period are unethical?
3. What does Historian B consider to be the entrepreneur's major contributions to the free world?
4. Is the quote from Historian B a primary or secondary source? Explain.
5. What is the overall message presented in this quote?

## Document F

I ascribe the success of the Standard [Oil Company] to its consistent policy to make the volume of its business large through the merits and cheapness of its products. It has spared no expense in finding, securing, and utilizing the best and cheapest methods of manufacture. It has sought the best superintendents and workmen and paid the best wages... It has not only sought markets for its principal products, but for all possible by-products... It has not hesitated to invest millions of dollars in methods of cheapening the gathering and distribution of oils by pipe lines, special cars, tank steamers, and tank wagons... It has spared no expense in forcing its products into the markets of the world... It has had faith in American oil, and has brought together millions of money for the purpose of making it what it is, and holding its market against the competition of Russia and all the many countries which are producers of oil and competitors against American oil... It is too late to argue about the advantages of industrial combinations. They are a necessity. And if Americans are to have the privilege of extending their business... they are a necessity on a large scale...

**Source:** U.S. Congress, Industrial Commission, "John D. Rockefeller, Answers to Interrogatories," *Reports of the Industrial Commission: Vol. 2 Hearings before the Industrial Commission (Washington, DC, 1900), 794-797.*

### Document Analysis

1. Rockefeller gave this testimony to the U.S. Congress in 1899. Why do you think he was being investigated?
2. How have the practices of Standard Oil benefitted the consumer, according to Rockefeller?
3. According to Rockefeller, what has he done for the United States?
4. Does Rockefeller identify himself as a captain of industry or a robber baron?