

Biography of john david rockefeller



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The Gilded Age was the time for the rise of the upper class and suffering of the working class. America was viewed as a dream to outsiders. The reflecting tall skyscrapers in the cities, the railroads stretching from the east to the west coasts. The place of freedom and happiness, or so it seemed. The Gilded Age was the period in American history when “captains of industry” emerged and tycoons ran the streets and quite frankly the country.

Democracy at this time period was questionable, as those who worked endless hours in poorly conditioned factories had no say in government and no voice in politics. Those elected to office were paid off by big business men who would go to any lengths to keep their businesses illegal but profitable. If not extremely wealthy, extremely poor, with no inbetween. Perhaps the most successful tycoon was none other than John David Rockefeller, better known as John D. Rockefeller, the founder of the Standard Oil Company that would change the lives of Americans forever. Rockefeller, who started with little to nothing, built his dynasty by refining oil. His business started in a single town in Ohio and eventually grew large enough to buy up almost every other oil refiner in the country. Rockefeller was arguably the most hated man in America at the height of his empire, but was likely the most loved at the time of his death.

Rockefeller was born in 1839, named after his grandfather John David, to parents William Avery Rockefeller and Eliza Davidson. He was the second eldest of six with an older sister Lucy, then younger siblings William, Mary Ann, Franklin, and Francis. Rockefeller grew up in a balanced home with a father who lived the life of a pitman, a con artist (Collier and Horowitz, 8). As for his mother, her Calvinistic ways taught young Rockefeller morals (9). As a

young child the Rockefellers moved to Cleveland, Ohio, which would eventually be the birthplace of the wealthiest business of its time. The Rockefellers were not a wealthy family, but they were comfortable, and from the age of 7, Rockefeller was already making business investments by raising and selling a flock of turkeys which he had acquired by watching a hen's nest. The business ideas did not stop there though, after graduating from Cleveland Central High School, he went straight into working, and " on September 26 he was hired as a clerk accountant by Hewitt and Tuttle,"(12). Rockefeller was not looking for a comfortable life, he was looking for a legendary one.

Beginning a dynasty does not happen overnight, as for Rockefeller, his dynasty was built on both luck and strategy. When oil was found in Pennsylvania in 1859, the lives of American changed forever, as many men " got rich quick or went broke overnight,"(American Heritage, 71). Rockefeller saw from his wholesaling firm of Clark and Rockefeller that the oil drilling business was risky business, but in 1863 he began an oil refining business, partnering with Sam Andrews, Maurice Clark, and two of Clark's brothers(73). Rockefeller saw the future the oil industry had in Cleveland and its easy access to both railroads and waterways. With smart business moved and Rockefellers drive for success, it took him all of nine years to buy up and own the entire oil industry in Cleveland, and the once small business of oil refining had boomed into the Standard Oil Company.

At the peak of the Standard Oil Company, it owned about 90 percent of the oil industry in America. In 1865 the company was only refining 500 barrels of oil a day, but by 1870, the company was refining 3, 000 barrels of oil a

day(75). But that wasn't enough for Rockefeller, the company needed to expand, and the best way to expand was to control the railways.

Rockefeller's plan to control the railways was simple, " First he went to the Lake Shore Railroad and promised to give up shipping oil products by water, and to provide sixty railroad carloads daily, in return for considerable rate reductions by the Central Lake Shore management,"(75). The Standard Oil Company had control over the railroads from the 1870's-1911, when Rockefeller was taken to the Supreme Court. His control over the railroads had made him one of the most hated men in America. It had allowed his company to expand all over the country, starting by absorbing the South Improvement Company for stocks. But activist Ida Tarbell would not allow Rockefeller's empire to continue to grow, she published a book in 1904, The History of the Standard Oil Company, which stated, "...So as long as the Standard Oil Company can control transportation as it does day-to-day, it will remain the master of the oil industry, and the people of the US will pay for their indifference and folly..."(Tarbell). Rockefeller simply stated in his book, Random Reminiscences of Men and Events, that his dealings with the railroads were " methods of business,"(Rockefeller). But in 1911, the supreme court ruled that his actions violated the Sherman Antitrust Acts and ordered the Standard Oil Company to be dissolved. The company broke up into 37 smaller ones, none of these smaller companies ever amounted to the size of Standard Oil.

Despite his " America's most hated man" persona, heeding to Andrew Carnegie's appeal to the commonwealth Rockefeller founded the Rockefeller foundation. The Rockefeller foundation, " donated seventy-three thousand

shares of stock in Standard Oil of New Jersey to the first three trustees of what later became the Rockefeller foundation,”(The Incredibly Wealthy, 760). The Rockefeller Foundation helped turn around his image as he continued to make handsome contributions to health, population sciences, agricultural and natural sciences, arts and humanities, social sciences, and international relations. He also provided to education as he endowed the University of Chicago which allowed the school to open its doors in 1892. The Foundation even donated \$100, 000 to the Red Cross which provided the founding for them to set up headquarters in Washington D. C. But perhaps the contribution Rockefeller held dearest to himself was the 10 percent of his yearly earning that he donated to his church since the beginning of his career(761).

When the name Rockefeller is mentioned today, most people think of the height of wealth and America’s Gilded Age, the beginning of the millionaire class, a class which Rockefeller was the leader. Rockefeller represents oil and the Standard Oil Company which arguably turned America into a society run by petroleum oil. Perhaps the finger could be pointed at Rockefeller for the beginning of the destruction of the environment. The ozone layer protecting the Earth from the Sun’s harmful UV rays has almost reached its breaking point from carbon dioxide emissions which are released in mass quantities daily from the burning of petroleum oil. The US is not the sole cause for the large amounts of CO₂ released into the atmosphere but it plays a huge part in it. Rockefeller may not have discovered oil in America, but he did put it in almost every American’s household, and ultimately has played a key role in the destruction of the environment. His role in the oil industry was

his claim to fame as a “ Captain of Industry,” but it could also potentially ruin his name as a successful businessman.

Works Cited

- Bromberg, Howard. *Great Lives from History* . Salem Press, 2011.
- Collier, Peter, and David Horowitz. *The Rockefellers: an American Dynasty* . Summit Books, 1989.
- Heritage, American. *Captains of Industry* . American Heritage, 1966.
- Rockefeller, John D. *Random Reminiscences of Men and Events* . McClelland & Goodchild, 1909.
- Tarbell, Ida M. *The History of the Standard Oil Company: Part Two, Chapter VI, A Modern War for Independence* . S. S. McClure Co., 1904.