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2/9/2016

HIS109

Reaction Paper 1

80694

Modernity of the Captains’ Industries

The Second Industrial Revolution in the 19th century was an era of progress and turmoil for many American citizens. The captains of industry, J.P. Morgan, John D. Rockefeller, and Andrew Carnegie were an important part of the success in America becoming one of the leading producers of technology and industrial wealth that led to systematization and the improvement of the American populace. Carnegie’s steel cooperation made use of the Bessemer process to produce steel at a cheaper and faster rate, making steel an invaluable material. The captains of industry were able to make major investments that would save failing businesses. Harsh working conditions were only the side-effects of employment opportunities and different ways of living made possible by the success of large corporations and a drive for better processes. In light of these facts, the captains of industry had made progressive attempts that led to success and innovation in the late 19th century.

Andrew Carnegie was a businessman who used the Bessemer converter to produce steel at an efficient rate. The material used to make steel had become cheaper due to the Bessemer process, and had allowed for greater potential profit. Uses for mass-production of steel included: the creation of big buildings; manufacturing cannons, bullets, and other weaponry to be used during the civil war; and more importantly, building functioning railroads. Building railroads was more important from a business standpoint because with more railroads, Carnegie could transport his steel to multiple locations and expand his business. The same goes for Rockefeller and his major company, Standard Oil. He proclaimed in *The Gospel of Wealth*, that “Not evil, but good has come to the race from the accumulation of wealth by those who have the ability and energy to produce it.” (Qtd. in Tindall and Shi, 588) While social Darwinism was a concept brought about by misinterpretation, it was not entirely wrong.

Big businesses had the power, wealth, and resources to capitalize on major investments. It is no surprise that the captains of industry were wealthy. John D. Rockefeller could have capitalized on the oil wells that were drilling in Titusville, Pennsylvania, Pittsburg, or Cleveland, at the time. He chose Cleveland, due to the advantage of its railroads. This worked for Rockefeller, as he bought out out competition and he owned 90% of the oil industry by 1879. Rockefeller had started a monopoly, which was not preferable concerning the common good. However, buying out and forcing out competition was how he made most of his fortune. Making money was essential to upholding to potential of big businesses at the time. Rockefeller proclaimed himself, “It is too late to argue about the advantages of [huge] industrial corporations. They are a necessity” (Tindall and Shi, 586). Even so, some would say “pay nobody a profit” was not beneficial to the common people.

Historians and students alike see the poor labor conditions and child labor as terrible events. Furthermore, that the captains of industry are indirectly responsible for this outcome. That is a sad truth. However, the benefits beside these poor working conditions are too important to ignore. The benefit to reconsider is the act of creating jobs. As the big businesses boomed, workers were needed to keep up with high demand. This not only raised employment opportunities, but changed the lifestyle of multiple Americans. In Howard Zinn’s *A people’s History of the United States*, Zinn quotes an article from the *Daily Tribune*:

“The leading coal an iron men of the South, who have been in this city during the last ten days … thoroughly satisfied with the business of the year, and more than hopeful for the future. The time for which they have been waiting for nearly twenty years, when Northern capitalists would be convinced … of the immense profits to be gained in the investment of their money in developing the fabulously rich coal and iron resources … has come at last.” (qtd. Zinn, 202, 1980)

These Americans moved into big cities just to find paying jobs. They were highered, and because they had paying jobs, they would be able to buy products and services from other industries. The conditions of labor may have been harsh, but opportunities for employment allowed for more money to be made, and a change in lifestyle that would push the workforce closer to modern society.

In conclusion, the captains of industry had reformed the structure of American industries which led to success through systematization. The process of making steel in massive quantities pushed the foundation of new cities and technology. The major investments of those like Rockefeller allowed sole businesses to flourish and opened new opportunities for industries and their advancements. While the labor was tough, new job opportunities changed many American lives and put them in a more modern age, run by systematic efficiency. No matter how it is observed, progress was made to better and advancement of industrial progress in America.