

A New War Begins

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.

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?

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.

5. What does it mean to "beat the odds," and how is John Rockefeller an example of this concept?
6. What is refining oil, and why was it so important when oil first became a popular commodity?
7. 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?
8. What was the Panic of 1873?

Bloody Battles

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?

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?

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.

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

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.

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?

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.

4. What is the difference between AC and DC power?
5. What do you think of Morgan's decision to buy out Thomas Edison? Do you think this decision was fair to Edison?
6. 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"?
7. What is "Morganization"? Why was this approach an important and notable feature of the American economy?

The Men Who Built America
When One Ends, Another Begins

Name: _____ Date: _____

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.

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?

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.

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