



## ROBBER BARON OR CAPTAIN OF INDUSTRY?



**ROBBER BARON:** A Robber Baron is defined as one of the American industrialists (big business leader) of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century who became wealthy by unethical (cheating) means, such as questionable stock market operations and exploitation (unfair and selfish treatment) of labor. The term robber baron was originally used in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries to describe feudal lords who robbed travelers passing through their kingdoms.

**CAPTAIN OF INDUSTRY:** A captain of industry is defined as a business leader that benefits the nation in a positive way. This includes increasing the availability of goods, creating more and new jobs, and donating money to benefit the well being of the people.

Were the founders of American industry robber barons or captains of industry?  
Were they good or bad for America and Americans?

The motives of big business leaders were wealth and power. Some think these powerful business men should be referred to as robber barons. This view defines them in a negative way. They would be described as cruel and ruthless business men who would stop at nothing to achieve great wealth. The robber barons were accused of exploiting (to treat unfairly and use for selfish purposes) workers and forcing horrible working conditions and unfair labor practices upon the workers. They displayed their great wealth in their opulent lifestyle while their workers lived in poor run down tenements or company towns.

Another view of the big business leader is that of a captain of industry. This term describes these powerful business men as ingenious (inventive skill and imagination) and industrious (hard working) leaders who transformed the American economy with their business skills. They were praised for these skills as well as for their philanthropy (charity).