

**Thorns Amongst the Tentacles:  
A Look into the Private and Public Depictions of the Standard Oil Company**



**Figure 1: Standard Oil Refinery #1, 1899**

Thorns Amongst the Tentacles

A Look into the Private and Public Depictions of the Standard Oil Company

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### Abstract

The purpose of my research is to evaluate whether the various representations of the Standard Oil Company held by various segments of the U.S. public were consistent with the company's actions within the legal framework of the Sherman Antitrust Act. Looking at the views of the company held by specific segments of society compared with the image projected with the company's own public image campaign, I will be able to develop a nuanced view of how the company was perceived, and hoped to be perceived, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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The death knell of the Standard Oil Company sounded in 1911 when the Supreme Court decision declared the company in conflict with the Sherman Antitrust Act. The decision required the dissolution of Standard into thirty companies that today are the remnants of this pioneering, cutthroat trust. ExxonMobil, Chevron, and British Petroleum (BP) are some of the best-known “baby Standards” operating in the oil business today. The continuing legacy represented by these fragments of Standard cannot even begin to reconstitute the unique challenge this company presented to the U.S. public, to the business culture, or to the U.S. government in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The portrayal of Standard Oil Company by journalists, religious leaders, politicians, businessmen, and the Supreme Court sought to explain, depict, or vilify Standard Oil. The vividly judgmental language used in writing about Standard Oil revealed the concerns of Americans who were upset by the appearance in the late nineteenth century of very large businesses that were able to control the supply and manipulate the prices of items necessary in the everyday lives of families. Depictions of “the Standard” drew upon enduring political and cultural traditions—deeply rooted in American political and religious values—that spelled out what a business operating decently should—and should not—do. Highly visible discussions of the business practices of “the Standard” opened a window on the thinking of Americans on the importance of competition in the oil industry, the tradeoffs that might be necessary in order to achieve efficiency in the industry, and the moral standards that could and should be expected from a highly capital intensive industry such as refining oil. Conflicting opinions on these matters contributed to the many different “faces” of the Standard that danced before the public eye. Opinions crystallized after the passage in 1890 of the Sherman Antitrust Act, a major piece of organic legislation intended to record the nation’s vision of business ethics in positive law.

Contrasting “society’s” judgments along these lines to the public image that the company attempted to cultivate, both before 1890 and within the Sherman framework, will allow evaluation of the various images of the Standard and, more generally, of big business in the era when the modern business corporation emerged as the nation’s most powerful institution—not only in the economy, but in society and culture as well.<sup>1</sup>

Examination of representation--both language and images--for or against the Standard Oil Company, will show how differing definitions of the proper size, role, practices, and ethics of business contributed both to the reinvigoration of the U.S. republican tradition and to the shaping of modern liberalism in the United States.

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<sup>1</sup> On the cultural power of the corporation, see Olivier Zunz, *Making America Corporate, 1870-1920* (London: University of Chicago, 1990). On the evolution of the corporate form, see also Chandler, *Visible Hand: Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1977); idem, *Scale & Scope: Dynamics of Industrial Capitalism* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1990). Martin J. Sklar, *The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988) frames the rise and dominance of the corporate form as a deliberate construction of a dominant capitalist social class engaged in shielding a valuable mechanism for capital accumulation.



*Journalism: Depictions from Newspapers and Magazines*

“Possibly you fellows at 26 Broadway don’t realize that it is the press that is making a lot of trouble for you. The world is filled up with people that depend, in a measure on the newspapers as to how they shall think and act.”<sup>2</sup> Written by a small newspaper editor in a letter addressed to the Standard offices, this statement accurately described Standard’s overwhelming experience with the press. The Standard Oil Company and John D. Rockefeller were at the center of an intense debate waged on the front pages of U.S. news media. Although some stories managed to illustrate the company in a positive light, the company and its most visible leader, John D. Rockefeller, received a critical amount of negative press coverage. Feeding the public’s voracious appetite for the company’s profile, journalism fed fuel to the fire with its multi-layered, complex depictions of the Standard face. Although widely divergent depictions arose, journalists sought to explain, depict, and frame Standard’s identity, organizational structure, and conduct in light of their conceptions of accepted standards of morality.

Focusing on the Standard Oil Company’s monopolistic tendencies and use of the corporate structure, an article entitled “A Lampful of Oil” sought to depict Standard’s history in a positive light. In the economic era of big business, this *Harper’s Monthly Magazine* article framed Standard within the larger economic changes in the U.S. Although focused on developing an innovative and efficient Standard identity, the article did discuss Standard’s controlling tendencies in the petroleum industry. Affirming many individuals’ charges of abuse and monopoly, the article explained that Standard’s “tentacles have reached out and bodily appropriated the transportation facilities and refineries of oil, suppressing all opposition and

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<sup>2</sup> Ivan G. English to Starr J. Murphy, August 14, 1906, folder 864, box 115, series C, RG 2 OMR, Rockefeller Family Archive Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York (hereafter RAC).

competition.”<sup>3</sup> Standard’s depiction as an octopus and the reference to “tentacled” limbs created the image that the company was relentlessly spreading its influence throughout the oil industry. The Standard’s intentions were confirmed as both controlling and monopolistic.

Although many negative connotations were present in Standard’s depiction as an octopus, the nuanced image of the company was framed in light of society’s changing economic structure. Turning from popular imagery, the influential journal *Harper’s Monthly* affirmed Standard’s presence as a natural, organic result of economic evolution. For many, Standard’s fast-paced growth was considered sufficient to view the company’s actions in a light of suspicion. However, offering an alternative depiction, the *Harpers’* article disagreed, stating, “It may be said, however, that the growth of the Standard Oil Company was merely in keeping with the commercial tendency of the present time, which leads to aggregation of capital.”<sup>4</sup> From this liberal perspective, perhaps influenced by the Spencerian thinking that was much in vogue in the 1880s, the new era of economic development and formation of big business was a potentially permanent change for the structure of U.S. business. Many liberal reformers came down on the side of the corporation and “acceded to the seeming inevitability of economic consolidation.”<sup>5</sup> Thus the Standard needed to be understood within this new changing pattern. The abandonment of the independent producer ethos and its moral holdings made the development of a new framework with which to judge these new economic powerhouses vitally necessary.<sup>6</sup> Holding its own amongst other monopolistic corporations, Standard’s actions and history were not far from conventional.

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<sup>3</sup> “A Lampful of Oil,” *Harper’s Monthly Magazine*, p. 252, folder 378, box 48, series A, Record Group 2 OMR, RAC.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>5</sup> Nancy Cohen, *The Reconstruction of American Liberalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press: 2002), 86.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.



The protection of Standard's image also relied upon framing Standard's business as a source of success and innovation, with the intention of encouraging public recognition of its usefulness in the private business sector. Alluding to the company's freedom from any government support, Harper's suggested that the Standard had the right to pursue the success it had achieved through independent enterprise. The point here was to distinguish Standard's image from the popular images of railroad companies, which had received government subsidies to buy up property and build up lines of transportation. Standard's actions had been the sole reflection of its own agenda and thus "should be less subject to hostile criticism than had it been the recipient of grants, subsidies, or valuable public franchises."<sup>7</sup> Separated from the public sector, Standard's actions were normal when viewed from the standpoint of the business sector. Standard was also "a natural and not a legislative monopoly," a fact that imbued its actions with further legitimacy.

Standard's business-appropriate image was further solidified in a *New York Times* article entitled "The Corporation's Side." The interviewee was a self-described businessman "prominent in several of the most criticized corporations in this country."<sup>8</sup> Discussing the public's predisposition towards "corporation baiting," the author raised doubts as to Standard's recent press depictions. Evaluating the Company's success and innovation, he remarked, "Why should it be necessary to resort to any underhand tricks? With its methods it could not help but go ahead, it could not but override competition. Reliance on innovative forms of business, it made no sense that Standard would have to cheat in order to heighten its success or standing."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> "The Corporation's Side," *New York Times*, April 1, 1906, folder 886, box 118, series C, RG 2 OMR, Rockefeller Family Archives, RAC.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Concerned by the press' supposed "corporation baiting," the businessman focused on countering images of Standard's dishonesty by framing the company as a patriotic and moral example. In the face of extreme opposition, the Standard continued to go about its business, allowing the public all across the nation to benefit, unknowingly, from its success. Standard, "or the trust as they call it, brought within reach of the poorest one of the greatest comforts of life-artificial light. It has turned back its profits into the commercial life of the country, creating new enterprises" and offering opportunities to American laborers.<sup>10</sup> The meaningful image of light, a word that carries connotations of warmth and happiness, was brought to the needy by the grace and goodwill of the Standard.

Offering a unique perspective on the Standard Oil Company from the purview of an old employee, C.W. Archbold shared his positive thoughts on the company's success. Writing in response to an article printed in the *Western Christian Advocate*, the former employee focused on developing Standard's benevolent and generous image. Archbold asserted that Standard's achievements were illustrative of high moral character. Producing the safest petroleum for the public's use, the company should be praised; it should "in fairness be admitted that nothing but an exceedingly strong corporation embodying not only great financial strength [and] commanding executive ability of the highest order...has accomplished in thus causing the widespread use of American petroleum."<sup>11</sup> By shedding light on the innovation and the company's achievements in spreading oil throughout the entire country, the old employee saw the relentless media as off base. Noting goals as noble as striving to serve Americans, Archbold saw Standard's face as innocent of wrongdoing.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> C.W. Archbold, "Something about the Standard Oil Company from the Standpoint of an Old Employee," folder 886, box 118, series C, RG 2 OMR, Rockefeller Family Archive, RAC.



Standard Oil also represented the perfect balance of success and proper employee to employer relationships, in this loyal retainer's view. Standard's success was dependent upon not only its methods but also its dedicated working force. Working for Standard in the past, Archbold utilized his own personal experiences to further strengthen Standard's image. He stated, "I am still of the opinion that the Standard Oil Company is the model large company in America and perhaps the world in the treatments of its employees."<sup>12</sup> Archbold's depiction raised Standard as a proud example of success and high achievement, representing the virtues of the American economy. Depicting the Standard as a source of pride and as a role model for other companies, Archbold's image served to counter the shameful imagery employed by many journalists.

Solidifying his standing with the company also required Archbold to offer his own reflections on the popular and unfair criticisms that tainted the Standard's public image. Contributing to the fear of the country, "Standard phobia" was inspired by untruth and caused panic and fear. With Standard's success, he affirmed his belief that a benevolent company was run by benevolent men. "The master minds of the... Company will compare favorably with any group of men connected with the great industrial enterprises...not only on the score of ability but also on the scores of character," he insisted.<sup>13</sup> Referring to the individual characters of the company's trustees, Archbold was attempting to depict Standard's actions as driven by moral character while also serving to demystify the company's massive corporate structure. If men with positive moral characters were in charge of the company, then logically in Archbold's view the company's end results would be noble.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

In contrast to the goals of the various articles referenced above, other newspapers and journalists also sought to denigrate the company's image instead of building it up. One such article entitled "The Great Oil Monopoly" offered a truly terrible picture of the company and its methods of securing a fortune. Seeking to satiate the reader's curiosity, the article described in chilling detail the landscape of one of the Standard Oil refineries. Portraying Standard's works as a silent threat, the writer stated, "Its business is all done by a few hands, although an army of executive officers carry out their decree... Many transactions never go on the books."<sup>14</sup> Mysterious business dealings portrayed Standard in a criminal light. Full of secrets and armed with conspiracy, the Standard clearly had something to hide.

Continuing to create an image of suspense and mystery, the writer further described the condition of Standard employees. Looking for answers to explain the relative anonymity of Standard's large work force, the writer described the image of the Standard factory. "The works are fenced in by high pickets to keep the public out; but a no less palpable and effectual reserve hedges the employees in, and causes them to keep their counsel to themselves."<sup>15</sup> Banking on suspense, the mysterious Standard factory alluded to the presence of an undistinguishable fear.

The business practices and the relatively isolated, mysterious Standard factory hinted at the company's mistreatment of its employees. Isolated within the vast confines of the Standard properties, employees were cut off from the outside by high fences and threatened into silence. The Standard's use of "skill and watchfulness, and an iron rule [to] secure it, the greatest possible silence is kept in the Standard block, and about the business."<sup>16</sup> Creating the image of a

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<sup>14</sup> "The Great Oil Monopoly" *New York Times* (1857-1922), November 19, 1882, <http://www.proquest.com> (Accessed February 19, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.



block spoke of the employee's entrapment within the walls of the Standard. Keeping their employees aloof from the public, the Standard kept a menacing watch over their activities. The climatic description and the use of the iron hand imagery compared Standard's governing style to that of a corrupt, cruel dictator. Suppressing the rights of individuals, Standard's face was that of a greedy, villainous oppressor.

Standard's competitive methods also constituted a main element of the cruel and corrupt Standard face. Drawing on the experiences of failed independent refiners, many journalists strengthened Standard's immoral image. Concerned with the wellbeing of the independent refiners and public, an article entitled, "Ruined by a Great Corporation" told the story of a small hardworking independent business' failure at the hands of Standard. Commenting on the duplicity of Standard's business ethics, the writer used the story to warn all men to keep an eye on the company. After signing a contract with an independent barrel producer, the "Standard Company learned the magnitude of the business he was engaged in [and] it immediately began in an underhand way to ruin him and his trade."<sup>17</sup> Standard's corrupt methods had no allegiance to any set of moral business standards. Willing to break contracts and undermine its allies, Standard had no ethical limits.

Standard's willingness to undermine competition against the independent barrel producer was committed in a corrupt, and sneaky manner. Secretly breaking its contract with the businessman, the company began slowly and steadily to take control over the independent's business. The company "ordered him to remove his business to the wholesale office and conduct it as a subordinate department." After removing his name from the company's ledger, the

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<sup>17</sup> "Ruined by a Great Corporation," *New York Times* (1857-1922), October 26, 1883, <http://www.proquest.com> (accessed February 20, 2011).

Standard then removed his name “from his wagons and from the brands of oil... The Company informed the Merchants’ National Bank not to honor his checks and ordered his account to be transferred.”<sup>18</sup> Standard’s steady and underhanded methods had resulted in the loss of one man’s business and his independence.

Understanding Standard’s monopolistic methods in a larger contextual view, an article entitled “War on Trusts” sought to explain the beliefs of the professional society of the Virginia Bar Association. Surprisingly, however, to both the writer and the association was the remarkable fact that the report had been written by a group of lawyers, three of whom were corporation lawyers.<sup>19</sup> From a professional and business perspective, the Virginia Bar Association expressed major concerns over the development of big business in society. Framing Standard Oil’s structure within a larger view of the changing economic forces, the Association saw “combinations as an economic force...fast coming to take the place of competition.”<sup>20</sup> Supplying the reader with evidence of different types of combinations (from labor union combinations to business), the Association saw the Standard Oil as a powerful symbol and testament of the changing economy.

Legal thinkers had to situate the new group focused business structure within the past vision of entrepreneurial business that was controlled by positive law. Framing the corporation within this commonly held manner presented many problems and like the liberal reformers of their era, legal thinkers grappled to understand corporate organization as natural and normal.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> “War on the Trusts,” *Washington Post* (1877-1922), August 28, 1903, <http://www.proquest.com> (accessed March 1, 2011).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Morton J. Horwitz, *The Transformation of American Law, 1870-1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 75.



The corporation was also treated by some legal thinkers “as no different from a partnership,” a fact reinforced in many anti-consolidation cases where businessmen were treated as the “real legal actors of the corporation.”<sup>22</sup> The worries of the Virginia Bar Association reflect the chaotic legal climate of the late nineteenth century.

With the presence of strong monopolistic corporations, such as Standard Oil, the Association depicted the company’s actions as in opposition to the fundamental image of a market economy that undergirded Americans’ understanding of their capitalism. Maintaining competition in the marketplace was essential to sustaining a virtuous economy, in the Adam Smithian view that had prevailed largely since the early days of the republic. Standard’s extreme success “has taken by contract or by force, the business of ten thousand corporations and merchants in all parts of the Union.”<sup>23</sup> Strong imagery characterized Standard’s success as relative to the destruction it had imposed upon the competitive fields in the oil industry. The monopoly form of business was self-centered. Motivation to combine was economically self-motivated; thus the “monopoly was... desirable - that is for the monopolist,” in this lawyerly view.<sup>24</sup> Solely created to amass great wealth and destroy other’s capacity for business and independent action, the Standard represented both a negative change in the capacity of the American economy to protect consumers and a threat to basic understandings of relations between capitalism and individual freedom. The previous place of the corporation in the eighteenth century was as “the municipality, a public body charged with carrying out public

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

functions.”<sup>25</sup> The new forced era of private corporation provided many legal thinkers with the duty to redevelop the American principle of competition.<sup>26</sup>

Grouped upon both sides of the Standard Oil debate, newspapers and magazines offered a momentous challenge towards the continued existence of the giant Oil Trust. The diverse views offered by supporters and critics representing various interests revealed the public’s confusion when it came to evaluating Standard Oil’s presence in the economy. Issues of morality, power, innovation, and leadership formed Standard’s public images, images that could be accepted or rejected by the public at large.

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<sup>25</sup> Morton J. Horwitz, *The Transformation of American Law, 1780-1860* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 112.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*



*Muckraking Journalism: Depictions from the Writings of Investigative Journalists*

The sharp, acerbic pens of a special class of investigative journalists, the self-proclaimed “muck-rakers” of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries built up a highly negative portrait of the Standard Oil Company that contrasted keenly with the more mixed and nuanced picture of the conventional press. The Company’s involvement in controversial business mergers, its secret contracts with various railroad companies, and its skill at cutting down competitors gave these writers plenty of ammunition with which to form their views of the Standard. The investigative writings of Henry Demarest Lloyd, Ida M. Tarbell, and a collection of articles published by “Truth’s investigator” (a pen name) provided varied statements on this unusual corporation. All the writers insisted on evaluating Standard’s behavior in moral and ethical terms. In addition, their work examined in more detail the role that efficiency and competition played in the company’s bid for power.

Henry Demarest Lloyd’s *Wealth against Commonwealth* detailed the inner workings of the company against the backdrop of the democratic institutions of the United States. His favorite points of reference were the state legislatures and the marketplace. Lloyd’s career as a social reformer and his belief in the importance of “democratic brotherhood” influenced his view of the Standard. This belief in the cooperation of individuals for the good of the commonwealth led him to a harshly critical perception of the Standard Oil Company’s actions.<sup>27</sup> It was Lloyd’s philosophy on human cooperation and the importance of placing the wellbeing of society above one’s own desires that framed his judgment of Standard Oil.

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<sup>27</sup> Chester Destler, ed., *Henry Demarest Lloyd* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1963), 296.

Differing from Lloyd's philosophical focus, Ida M. Tarbell's *The History of Standard Oil* was concerned more with the human condition. Tarbell's celebrated account was a successful compilation of her popular serial report published in *McClure's Magazine*. Tarbell's fascination with business and the Standard began at an early age. Her father was an independent oil refiner, who was hard hit by Standard's hostile tactics.<sup>28</sup> Tarbell's approach focused on Standard's immorality and its treatment of independent refiners. Throughout her writing, the position of the worker or small proprietor greatly concerned her. She illustrated this concern through her descriptions of the many individuals who suffered losses due to their contact with the Standard.

*The Great Oil Octopus* represented a departure from Tarbell's focus on the individual; rather this collection proceeded by severely raking Standard through the mud from a highly moralistic perspective. The purpose of the various articles represented in the collection was to organize many of the writings on the Standard Oil into one convenient source. The contents of this collection provided the reader a "completed" history of the company and its business dealings.<sup>29</sup>

Lloyd's *Wealth against Commonwealth* presented Standard Oil as an immoral threat to the wellbeing of the republic, the principles of democracy, and the liberty of the individual. Standard's use of the secret rebate allowed it to secure the lowest transportation rates for its oil barrels. This rebate enabled them to ruthlessly lower their prices below those available to the independent refiner.<sup>30</sup> The company's secret agreements with railroads such as the Erie and New

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<sup>28</sup> Robert Kochersbeger, *More than a Muckraker* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1994), xxix.

<sup>29</sup> Truth's Investigator, *The Great Oil Octopus* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1911), 5. Due to the rather vague details regarding the identification of both the sources and authors of each respective article, I was unable to gather sufficient evidence to provide background on the motivations or beliefs of the anonymous collector.

<sup>30</sup> Gilbert Montague, *The Rise and Progress of the Standard Oil Company* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1902), 16.



York Central disadvantaged all other refiners who were unable to secure transportation rebates. Lloyd's concern was for these smaller, independent refiners who were unable to ship their products at a reasonable price. Standard Oil was their enemy, an enemy "disguised as an American citizen, although he sees property destroyed and life lost and liberty thrown wherever he moves."<sup>31</sup> This endangerment of individual liberty represented a larger threat against the primary values of republican ideology. At the center of republican ideology, the liberty and independence of the producer-citizen was essential to the survival of the republic. With the commonwealth in danger from the corporation, Standard made a mockery of important democratic values. The company took away the chance for fair and equal competition in the oil refining business. An environment that prevented competition allowed Standard to absorb all other refineries or to dismantle them.

Lloyd's use of the moral argument was carried further to illustrate that the Standard was not content to monopolize a section of the economy, but also sought to wrap its tentacles around the state legislatures. Standard's actions were abhorrent when viewed through the lens of the common moral standards of human behavior. Lloyd widened the scope of his attack to condemn Standard's impact upon the country's democratic institutions. One such institution was the state legislature of Ohio, suitably named the "Coal-Oil" legislature. This group rejected bill after bill to regulate oil manufacturing and transportation.<sup>32</sup> The presence of legislators bribed by Standard enraged Lloyd. He stated that "the monotonous record of an unavailing struggle for the majority of millions to apply legal constitutional restraints on a minority of a few dozen" represented the

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<sup>31</sup> Henry Demarest Lloyd, *Wealth against Commonwealth* (Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, 1963), 38.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 135

flouting of justice.<sup>33</sup> Standard Oil was not concerned with the good of society because, Lloyd insisted, they undermined the country's liberty-giving institutions.

Unlike Lloyd's emphasis on democratic standards, Tarbell based her judgment on Standard's treatment of the individual. Tarbell's moral evaluations focused specifically on the plight of the independent refiner. Her investigative writings sought to bring the stories of these individual men and women to light. Tarbell's moral edge was present in her discussion of the abuse these people received under the iron fist of the Standard. The tale of the widower, "Mrs. B," perfectly encapsulated Tarbell's moral leanings. Shortly after the death of her husband, "Mrs. B" undertook to run his refining business. Interested in buying up her refineries, the Standard approached her and offered to take the business off her capable hands. In the end, "Mrs. B" sold her company well below its value. She had "rightly or wrongly . . . come to believe that a refusal to sell meant a fight with Mr. Rockefeller, that a fight would ultimately mean defeat."<sup>34</sup> Standard took advantage of the impossible environment they had created for independents and bought them out at stunningly low prices. Tarbell's concern for these "little people" provided her writing with a moral view point of Standard.

Tarbell's depiction of the company's disregard for individuals was further proved by her account of the individual responsible for the running of the company, John D. Rockefeller. Her discussion of his cutthroat attitude towards consolidation of his own oil empire illustrated her belief that Standard not only represented an immoral form of business, but also was headed by an immoral individual. Rockefeller was the head of the Standard Oil Company and was a prime target that many writers used to impugn the identity of the company. Tarbell described

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ida. M. Tarbell, *The History of the Standard Oil* (New York: Peter Smith, 1950), 207.



Rockefeller as a man driven solely by greed and profit; “to place love of independent work above love of profits was as incomprehensible to him as a refusal to accept a rebate because it was wrong.”<sup>35</sup> For Rockefeller, profit was king, and it did not matter how many independent men he ruined to achieve his high margin of success. Her moral concern was based on the plane of the individual’s wellbeing as contrasted to Lloyd’s focus on the health of the citizenry as a whole. Yet she shared his concern for the independence of small producers as a vital element of a just and virtuous society.

The moral language utilized by Tarbell and Lloyd received a stronger expression of sentiment in *The Great Oil Octopus*. “Truth’s” outraged tone depicted Standard’s involvement in questionable business dealings as sufficient to prove the immorality of the company. After escaping any meaningful sanction at the hands of the Ohio State Court of Appeals for its involvement in the South Improvement Company, the “Standard Oil Trust in 1872 still continued to baffle justice in America and to outrage the moral sense of the world.”<sup>36</sup> This strong language left no room for doubt in readers’ minds that the Standard was an evil corporation. This collection continued along the path of invoking moral injustice by comparing Standard to a burglar. To answer the suggestion that what the Standard did was simply normal business practice, the writer responded that the sentiment was “absolutely unfounded, and might as well be urged by a burglar who can make a fortune in one night; but then his avocation is not . . . referred to as business” in the morning papers.<sup>37</sup> Morally devoid of any concern for the individual and content to call what monstrous deeds that it perceived as legitimate actions of “business, the Standard stood forth in Truth’s Investigator as a moral outrage.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>36</sup> Truth’s Investigator, 49.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 54.

In each work, the Standard Oil Company threatened the values of humanity and of democracy. To further round out this image of Standard Oil, each writer's view of the issues of efficiency and competition added to the rendering of the beastly corporation as immoral and vicious.

According to Lloyd, the pursuit of efficiency did not necessarily produce good or evil actions; rather, Standard's efficiency achieved through dishonest methods contributed to its ability to exert more control over the economic markets. A monopoly represented the most extreme form of efficiency, achieved in the case of Rockefeller's consolidation of the oil industry by the company's use of the corporate structure. Lloyd evaluated Standard's claims of efficiency by judging the intentions behind its consolidations. Lloyd stated, "The business motivated by self interest of the individual runs into monopoly at every point it touches."<sup>38</sup> Standard's dishonest efficiency was driven by pursuit of higher profits. Seeking to gain rate discriminations and secret rebates from the railroads, Standard was utilizing its size, and not economically efficient business practices, to make profit and exert control over the oil industry.

Tarbell's description of Standard Oil's business practices and monopolization illustrated her belief that the Standard had not gained legitimate efficiency either. Rather, it had gained a gross perversion of the term. Standard's motivation to attain the highest profit served as the basis for a corrupt efficiency achieved by the ways that Standard used its power in the business sector. The quest for profit allowed Standard to gain a foothold over the common people. As a machine, it "was a great thing to belong to . . . [It] always got what it wanted and which was making money as no business in the country had ever made it."<sup>39</sup> Standard used its position to exact

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<sup>38</sup> Lloyd, 169.

<sup>39</sup> Tarbell, 126.



harm on the smaller competitive refiners in the oil industry. Standard's confidence in its "efficient" business measures illustrated a true misunderstanding of the term. To Rockefeller, "where persuasion failed then, it was necessary . . . that pressure be applied . . . sufficient to demonstrate to those blind, recalcitrant individuals the inescapable failure of their companies."<sup>40</sup> In Tarbell's opinion it was not what drove Standard's bid for criminal efficiency but rather the false way in which it had earned it and then used it against the public that illustrated its immorality.

Similarly to Tarbell's opinion that Standard's efficiency was gained by illegal methods, the writings in *The Great Oil Octopus* also considered the company's unjust or false efficiency as inherently evil. The presence of monopolization in the oil industry had laid waste to the individual refiners' access to market opportunities. Standard utilized its illegal methods to contribute more efficient means towards developing its monopoly status. The company's "control over 90 per cent of the American oil refining business, and being almost the sole buyer . . . [The Company] had always aimed . . . at absolute monopoly."<sup>41</sup> Standard's control of the oil industry was enough for this writer to declare Standard's intentions and actions immoral.

Clearly, critics of Standard Oil did not consider illegal railroad rebates and price discrimination legitimate forms of achieving dominance in the industry. True business efficiency was achieved through cost cutting methods in production or transportation of the product, and Standard's receipt of rebates did not achieve true efficiency for the company.

Lloyd's perception that Standard Oil chose depredation over innovation to promote efficiency was further evidence that the company would continue to undermine the liberty of

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>41</sup> Truth's Investigator, 15-16.



independent refiners who could not compete at the ruinously low prices Standard was able to set. Lloyd's objections to Standard's competitive practices lay in how it played the oil market. It conducted its competitive strategies with "seemingly friendly hands empty of all tools of death . . . Rivals are [then] blown out of the highways, busy mills, and refiners turn to dust . . . and strong men . . . surrender their persons and properties to skillful artillerists."<sup>42</sup> This competitive, yet destructive, spirit was strongly against Lloyd's belief in the importance of working for the mutual benefit of society. Competition of the Standard's style was benefitting only a few. Predatory competition did not benefit the majority of society and in fact was destroying the livelihoods of many independent refiners.

Similarly to Lloyd's depiction, Tarbell described Standard's activities as focused on profit and undercutting competition. Tarbell's acceptance that business was pursued for profit did not excuse Standard Oil's competitive business practices. Her collection of refiners' testimonies helped to mold this predatory image of Standard. According to one witness, the Standard men had said that "they had facilities for freighting and that the coal-oil business belonged to them; and any concern that would start up . . . they had sufficient money . . . to wipe them out."<sup>43</sup> Tarbell followed this report with a statement affirming that the Standard used its wealth, power, and reputation to cow innocent independent refiners into accepting low prices for their livelihoods.<sup>44</sup> Tarbell upheld the importance of competition in the oil industry, but the way Standard had harnessed its power and used it to undermine all competition was morally unacceptable.

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<sup>42</sup> Lloyd, 150.

<sup>43</sup> Tarbell, 164.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 164.

The highly moralistic *Octopus* also viewed Standard Oil's competitive practices as predatory and an affront to fair competition. Detailing the process by which Standard absorbed many independent refiners' businesses, its authors found that the company would undersell to encourage public perception that independent refiners were slowly fading away. In this environment, the Standard could offer to "generously" buy out these "failing" companies. This process "was such a subtle game, and played with devilish cunning and persistency for years before it was definitely shown in its true light."<sup>45</sup> Standard Oil destroyed the market in which any semi-successful refinery that operated ethically could compete. In reality, Standard had created a situation in which it could gain the most profit.

The Standard Oil Company's image was developed to its fullest extent at the hands of many investigative journalists. Lloyd, Tarbell, and the unknown writers of *The Great Oil Octopus* questioned the identity of the Standard. Their conclusions created an image of a dangerous corporation, one that was a threat to its competitors and to its country. The use of false efficiency or efficiency gained not through legitimate means but rather through illegal actions and the competitive measures taken by the Standard Corporation gave it its reputation for being the ultimate representation of corruption and immorality represented in the business sector of the U.S.

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<sup>45</sup> Truth's Investigator, 126.



*Political Cartoons: Colorful Illustrations*

From biting prose to savagely critical depictions, the Standard Oil Company's image was further assaulted by many political cartoonists of the early twentieth century. Surely influenced and even inspired by their muckraking journalist counterparts, political cartoonists delivered a powerful and enduring vision of the company's true face. Frederic Opper, Udo Keppler, and John S. Pughe wielded their drawing pens to create yet another face of the Standard Oil Company. Standard's image was skewered along a variety of different axes, as cartoonists pictured the company's lack of a moral conscience, its predatory nature, and its insatiable quest for riches. Visions of criminals, kings, and even an octopus succeeded in defining yet another segment of society's picture of the company, a picture that allowed not an iota of doubt as to Standard's guilt.





Frederic Oppen's ironic twist on an iconic children's nursery rhyme about ABCs gone wrong features "O for the Oil Trust," a depiction of Standard Oil at its peak of predation and cruelty. The cartoon entitled "Nursery Rhymes for Infant Industries: An Alphabet of Joyous Trusts, No. 15" was published in 1901 at the height of Standard's corporate scheming.<sup>46</sup> Standard's image or face is represented by the central figure of the cartoon as a giant beastly man (if such a conventional word can be applied to the figure). Depicting the multifarious company as a single ghastly monster driven by a single mind served to simplify the public's own perspective on Standard Oil as well as to illustrate the belief that the company was controlled by one diabolical schemer, a man responsible for all of its atrocities. John D. Rockefeller became the "face" needed to represent a gigantic monopoly as an individual, as though he "was" the company despite its numerous trustees and owners. The criminal figure's proportion in the cartoon vastly overwhelms the other humans. Standard's behemoth structure was troubling in an era where many businesses had originally been seen as a partnership consisting of two (or perhaps a few) individuals. Oppen's cartoon commented on the foreseeable and dangerous future path for businesses in the U.S. To Oppen, bigger was not better, and it was Standard's sheer size that enabled it to abuse ordinary people. Questions about the extent of Standard's culpability found no leeway in Oppen's image of the company.

Delivering a guilty blow to Standard Oil, Oppen focused on the company's abuse and disregard for the suffering of the common man. The individual beneath the giant man's foot is crushed by the weight and dominance of Standard's size and might. Plaintively calling for help, the common man's pleas or the pleas of the everyman went unheard.<sup>47</sup> Apart from Standard's

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<sup>46</sup> Frederic Oppen, "Nursery Rhymes for Infant Industries: An Alphabet of Joyous Trusts, No.15," political cartoon, ca. 1901, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2005685052/>.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

huge size, Oppen supplied the giant with a club to help him uphold his title as a menace to the public. The club labeled "R.R. favors" provides the giant another weapon he used to quell the public and other potential threats to Standard's dominance in the petroleum industry.<sup>48</sup> Wielding these favors in the form of secret rebates, blind billing, and empty mileage, the Standard could forcefully slash its oil prices. With this downward price cut, many smaller companies were unable to compete at the Standard level.<sup>49</sup> The destruction of "competitive" rivals allowed Standard to swallow up its competitors until it reached something approaching Oppen's representation of a company of bloated proportions. As the Standard forcefully crushed its competition, the monstrous figure crudely states, "You ain't got no rights."<sup>50</sup> Standard's disregard for the rights of the individual showcased the company's lack of a moral conscience. Unrestrained by law or a moral conscience, Standard was represented as having a free rein to chew its way through the entire petroleum industry in order to complete the construction of its monopoly. Oppen's cartoon gave no hint as to what might be done to restrain Standard's conquest.

Oppen's characterization of Standard went well beyond the classic illustration of its face and its crimes. He also sought to illustrate the dangers created by the lack of restrictions or regulations of corporations by either state or federal government. Around the corner from Standard's predation crept the small and tired figure of a policeman. Preoccupied with sleepiness, the policeman showed no concern for the monopoly's crimes against the common man.<sup>51</sup> The policeman's inaction was a reference to President Theodore Roosevelt's Attorney General, Philander Knox, a Pittsburgh lawyer and banker known for being friendly to

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

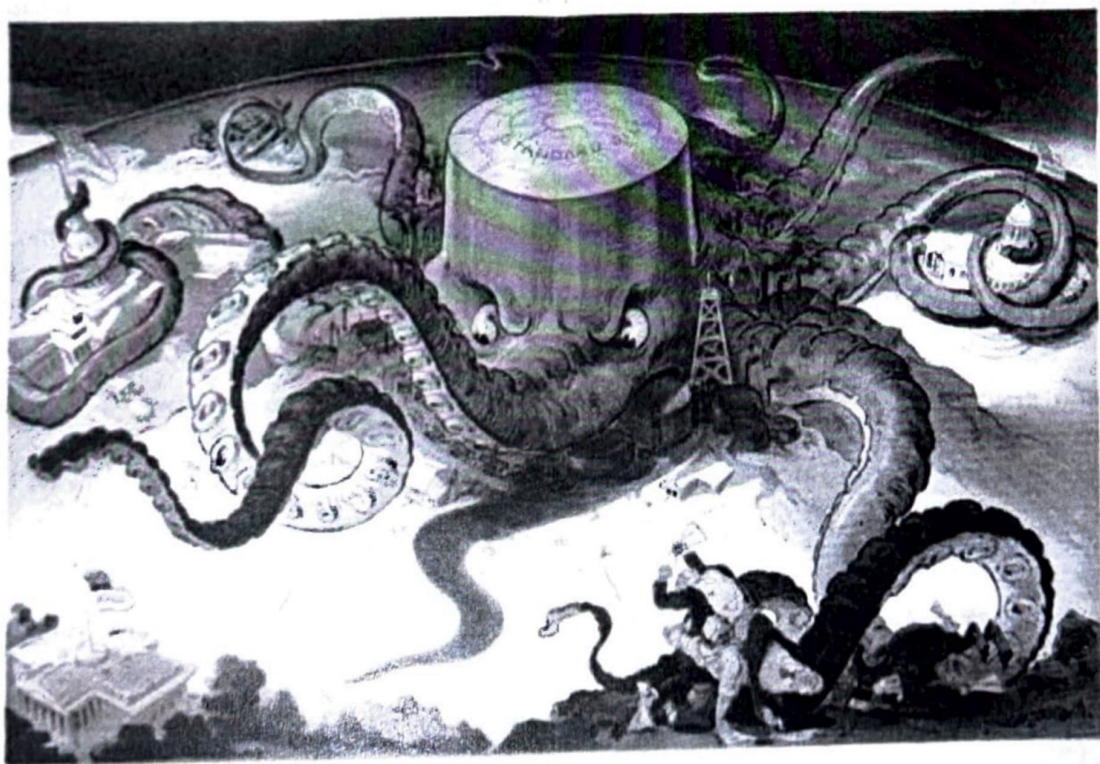
<sup>49</sup> Albert Carr, *John D. Rockefeller's Secret Weapon* (Toronto: McGraw Hill, 1962), 73.

<sup>50</sup> Frederic Oppen, "Nursery Rhymes for Infant Industries," 1901.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.



corporations. Oppen's imagery and his development of Standard's criminal behavior is further colored by his reference to a Dickens villain ("A Modern Bill Sikes"). Oppen's imagery underscores the written lines that the Oil Trust "defies the police, and does just what he likes."<sup>52</sup> The easy allocation of lawbreakers into good or bad would serve to simplify Standard's shady operations and to depict the company's secret actions as against the law. Society's lack of control over the giant Corporation was a realistic and uncomfortable fact and Oppen's illustration sought to remove any doubt in the viewer's mind as to Standard's culpability. It seems unlikely that Oppen intended his "policeman" to be understood as anything other than the "politician" who had sold his vote as a legislator and therefore his soul to Rockefeller and his ilk. As the Montana copper baron William Andrews Clark famously said during this era, "I never bought a politician who was not for sale."



<sup>52</sup> Ibid.



Encircling the North American continent, Udo Keppler's Standard Oil Octopus cartoon created another popular interpretation of the company and its sins. For Keppler, the image of an aggressive octopus accurately reflected the company's reveling in its use of predatory methods to monopolize the petroleum industry. The creature used its giant tentacles to reach into every corner of the United States.<sup>53</sup> Keppler depicted the company as being solely focused on developing its capabilities to the highest margin of achievement in both the petroleum industry and throughout the United States. Predatory in nature, the octopus came to represent more broadly the characteristics of monopoly and its use of cutthroat competition to vertically integrate. Yearning to achieve more and amass more fortune, the Standard is depicted as never resting in its bid for economic power. Apart from embodying the predatory image of the company, the octopus also evoked the faintest aura of efficiency. Simultaneously, the seven-limbed creature strangled all its competitors and reached deeply into the pockets of consumers. Standard's own successful vertical integration was effected from the top down, or in the case of Keppler's octopus from the head down. Standard's efficient manner in developing the industry under one company allowed it to corner the petroleum market.<sup>54</sup> Keppler's focus on Standard dominance is furthermore represented by the octopus's grasp on the United States and its glaring eyes looking to exploit another section of the country and entrench itself more deeply in the U.S. economy.

Throwing its hard gaze in the direction of the White House, the cartoon figure also suggested Standard's next target.<sup>55</sup> The goal of reaching the White House involved the larger political connections made by the corporation in an attempt to maintain its position in the

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<sup>53</sup> Udo Keppler, "Next" (NY: J. Ottmann Lith. Co., 1904), <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2001695241/>.

<sup>54</sup> John D. Rockefeller, *Random Reminiscences of Men and Events* (New York: Double Day, Page and Co., 1909), 42.

<sup>55</sup> Udo Keppler, "Next", 1904.

petroleum industry. The defensive position of the Standard Oil Company can be seen in the board's various maneuverings and attempts to insulate the company from the unpredictability of developing legislation. Another important aspect of the octopus lies directly beneath its head in the form of railroad tracks. The presence of transportation as being under the sway of the company affirms again its predatory intentions. Also, the size of the octopus in relation to its surroundings illustrates Keppler's focus on the behemoth qualities of the company.

Apart from dominating the various elements of the map, the Standard octopus sits atop both the steel and copper industries. Keppler's exact placement of these items beneath the body of the octopus attested to Standard's dominance as a powerful American trust. The protective position displayed by the creature over these industries also spoke for Keppler's underlying concern that Standard was reaching beyond petroleum to expand its influence in other extractive industries.<sup>56</sup> The fear of Standard's profit driven actions are represented by the animalistic illustration. Driven by survival and profit, the Standard animal is completely devoid of a conscience. Unbound by conventional moral parameters, Keppler's Standard identity is a threat to the entire nation. Keppler's imagery of an immoral giant oil octopus came to define another face of Standard.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.





William S. Pughe's cartoon entitled "The King of Combinations" illustrated Standard Oil and especially John D. Rockefeller as wearing a crown of gold. Rockefeller's crown is constructed from many mighty railroad companies and Standard Oil's storage tankers.<sup>57</sup> Pughe's use of Rockefeller as king of the combinations depicted the company's excesses as the work of one individual, a much easier target than the entire board of Standard Oil executives. The image

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<sup>57</sup> William S. Pughe, "The King of Combinations" (NYL J. Ottmann Lith. Co., 1901), <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2010651304/>.



of the king trust speaks to Standard's prominence in both the petroleum industry and within the larger economic developments of the early twentieth century. The outrageous success of the trust in coming to "control close to ninety percent of the country's refining capacity" was a feat achieved in just over a decade.<sup>58</sup> Although the image of a king can be used in a flattering manner, Pughe's kingly imagery was anything but flattering. The image of a king carried with it despotism, oppression, and corruption. The small stature and inflated head of Rockefeller illustrates his lack of natural leadership and the ill deserved fortune that he gained from his company.<sup>59</sup> Rockefeller's fierce, icy glare left no doubt in the viewer's mind as to this morally pathetic but financially gigantic king's future plans. Instead of illustrating subservience to a religion or a sense of duty, Rockefeller worshipped at the foot of the dollar bill. Patterned into his royal robes and topping his crown, the dollar bill sign or profit was the sole instigator of Rockefeller's actions and thus the actions of his company.<sup>60</sup> Motivation for profit allowed Standard to bypass moral norms and destroy any smaller company that stood in the way of Standard's monopolistic enterprise.

The presence of industries in the background serves to bolster the development of big business across the U.S. But it also served to frame Standard as being an influential and dangerous example and instigator for many other industries that remained free from monopolistic ambitions. Pughe illustrated Standard Oil as being a symbolic threat to the further development of the U.S. economy and argued that Standard's outrageous success would encourage more monopolistic enterprises. Pughe's cartoon ingeniously illustrates this fear and insinuates that apart from Standard's committed sins, it might even set a worse example for the future of

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<sup>58</sup> Alfred Chandler, Jr, *The Visible Hand* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1977), 321-322.

<sup>59</sup> William S. Pughe, "The King of Combinations," 1901.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

industry. Rockefeller's large size in the cartoon depicts him as a shining example of what can come of cruel predation and criminal tendencies in the business sector.<sup>61</sup>

The image of John D. Rockefeller poised atop a Standard Oil tanker lifts him high above the surrounding landscape, representative of his role in the formation of the Standard Oil trust as well as indicative of the riches and stature he received from the company's success. His giant crown, huge head, and tiny body illustrate Pughe's own evaluations on what delivered the successes of the Standard Oil Company. The prominence of the gold crown topped with a golden dollar sign affirmed the Company's thirst for profit at any cost. For Standard, profit was king. The crown itself consists of various railroad companies, naming the Jersey Central, the Reading, the St. Paul, and the Lehigh Valley railroads as the building blocks of Standard's glory.<sup>62</sup> Rockefeller and Standard successfully harnessed the interests of many different railroads and aligned the railroading interest with that of the company. The extreme placement of these railroad companies illustrates that the railroads served Standard and were further examples of Standard's ability to twist the interests of its fellow businessmen to meet their own goals.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.





Exploiting the role of a Christian missionary, another cartoon of Udo Keppler's entitled "The Gospel of St. John" delivers a mockery of Rockefeller's own actions in his company and as an individual. Slowly grinding together many American businessmen between two millstones entitled "Standard Oil Millstone," John D. Rockefeller gives his full and complete attention to

the wellbeing of a deserving soon to be Christian convert from a foreign land. The depiction of Rockefeller as a missionary plays into comedic irony through Keppler's title. "St. John" is so focused on the plight of an ignorant un-Christianized child that he scarcely cares about the damage his company is having on the average American. The ironic twist of Keppler's cartoon comes from the two millstones that serve both as Rockefeller's seat and as a means to extract money out of the common people.<sup>63</sup> Rockefeller's already disproportionate body is given both height and a position of power to effect change abroad. Rockefeller as a symbol of Standard Oil seemed to care more for the wellbeing of distant individuals than for American citizens. The unnatural position of Rockefeller atop the millstones reveals that Keppler did not see Standard as the end result of proper and natural evolutionary processes but rather the result of cruel acts and disregard for moral boundaries.

Rockefeller's ever-stuffed moneybags were filled to capacity because the Standard Oil Company millstones are literally squeezing the money of its victims. Holding out slips of paper money and stock certificates, these businessmen remain stuck in the grinding millstones of the Standard. The use of millstones provides another interpretation of Standard Oil as being unmovable, powerful, and unrelenting, grinding all opponents into dust. The company's presence in the petroleum industry is inescapable for any who wish to enter in the business. The Standard ground down its competition through price-cutting until companies either went bankrupt or sold. Rockefeller also benefits from the constant cash flow created by the mill stones while he protects

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<sup>63</sup> Udo Keppler, "The Gospel according to St. John" (NY: J.Ottmann Lith. Co., 1905), <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2011645697/>.



a bag labeled “Foreign \$ Missions.”<sup>64</sup> Rockefeller’s concern for converting Christians is a direct slap in the face to many who had succumbed under the force of the Standard.

Although Keppler’s cartoon seemed to equate John D. Rockefeller as exhibiting some priestly qualities, his figure is not given the traditional garb of a priest or that of a missionary. Rather he is characteristically dressed in a black business suit.<sup>65</sup> The symbolic business suit illustrates that even though he shows concern for religious causes and donates to Christian institutions, he is first and foremost a businessman. Portraying Rockefeller’s seemingly “saint like” activities in such a light mocks Rockefeller’s uncontrollable lust for profit for his company. The central image is comprised of John D. Rockefeller outstretching the bible and is labeled as “According to the Gospel of St. John.”<sup>66</sup> This cartoon depicts Keppler’s musings on the subject of whether one or many good acts should be praised if they are driven by a continued commitment to predatory business practices. For Keppler, the answer is no. This image also depicts the tension present in accounting for Rockefeller’s character and the character of Standard Oil Company. Rockefeller’s actions illustrated his lack of moral consistency. Keppler finds his answer through his illustrative explanation that even while Rockefeller may have “saved” a few individuals, his destruction of American businesses and livelihoods should not be forgotten. Rockefeller’s actions illustrated his lack of moral consistency.

The importance of visual art in drawing highly colorful and notorious portraits of the Standard Oil Company revealed that some political cartoonists saw Standard through the same frame the muckraking journalists had created. The company’s predation and lack of a consistent moral consciousness drove its insatiable and violent appetite for expansion. Opper, Pughe, and

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

Keppeler all sought to alert society to the dangers of the Standard Oil Company. Effectively filling in the lines of the Oil Trust's identity, the artists showcased their concern with the development of larger than life industries. The cartoonists all sought to illustrate the dangers posed by Standard Oil and their own fear as to what would develop in the future.



*Evangelists: Depictions of Good and Evil*

A wild storm of accusations and monstrous depictions left the Standard Oil Company's image severely battered. John D. Rockefeller's religious devotion and philanthropic work blurred the lines of his character. His generous (and solicited) gift to the American Congregationalist Board of Foreign Missions set off a frenzy amongst evangelical groups, where Sunday sermons and Church periodicals became ideological battlegrounds over whether this gift constituted dishonest money. Dr. Washington Gladden, Reverend Artemas J. Hayes, and the Congregational Committee group depicted the Standard and Rockefeller as an immoral threat to the religion, while Reverend Amory H. Bradford and commentators in other publications considered it immoral to judge a company that had not yet been condemned by the law as unjust.

The Social Gospel movement allowed these religious individuals the arena and the framework in which to shape their understanding of society's problems and seek for reform. The rising presence of urban problems allowed churches to take on a more active role in the non-religious community. No longer were many content to remain quiet in this changing era. The power of various reform movements involving the urban poor and the plight of the factory worker were chief among the concerns of social gospelers. Many intellectual laity became involved in this new form of activism and saw the Social Gospel as a "crusade for justice and righteousness in all areas of the common life."<sup>67</sup> The importance of social responsibility was an important center for the movement because it called for mutual brotherhood. Looking out for

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<sup>67</sup> Ronald C. White, Jr. and C. Howard Hopkins, *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform in Changing America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976), xii.

one's fellow brother was a sacred responsibility and these individual ministers took to their pulpits to preach their beliefs for or against Standard Oil.<sup>68</sup>

Dr. Washington Gladden's "Tainted Money" campaign pervaded many columns of evangelical journals such as *The Outlook* and *The Independent*. His call to reject the Rockefeller donation created yet another face of Standard and Rockefeller as not just a threat to the industrial world, but as an immoral threat to the churches. The immorality of Standard Oil business tactics stigmatized any money that was granted by this corrupt machine. For Gladden, Rockefeller's money came solely from the Standard so his donation carried with it the same black mark of dishonesty. In an editorial for *The Outlook*, Gladden wrote, the business "is a gigantic oppressor of the people... The unscrupulous and brutal way in which it always pushes its interests, with utter disregard to the ordinary principles of business morality are [sic] too flagrant."<sup>69</sup> For Gladden, morality and business occupied the same spheres and a company's disregard for the standards of moral behavior served as a stain upon the company's representatives. The suffering of the common man at the hands of the giant Oil Trust served as Gladden's indictment against the company and against Rockefeller's own wealth. Society's moral standards did not just apply to individuals but needed to be upheld by the new corporations that had vastly changed the economic landscape of the U.S.

Gladden had indicted Standard and Rockefeller on the moral high ground, but his "tainted money" proselytizing referred to the company's predatory nature. Lacking any sort of moral authority, Standard Oil was the criminal. Developing Standard's criminal identity supported Gladden's claims that Rockefeller's donation was stolen from the common people. A Gladden

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>69</sup> Washington Gladden, "Mr. Rockefeller and the American Board," *The Outlook* Vol. 79, No. 16 (22 April 2 1905), folder 3, box 1, series N, Record Group 2 OMR, Rockefeller Family Archives, RAC.



article entitled "The Church and the Reward of Iniquity" identified the Standard Oil Company as a violent robber. Gladden stated, "The despoiling of business competitors is, in the sign of God, just as truly a robber as the man who puts a pistol to your head in a dark alley."<sup>70</sup> Standard's predation on independent businessmen was as morally reprehensible as the deeds of an armed robber, attacking the public. Bloated and swollen, the Standard had been feeding on the common people, destroying their businesses and swallowing their hard earned money. Passionately pushing his views upon the reader, Gladden insisted that Rockefeller's money had been taken from the pockets of hard workingmen and their families. By accepting stolen goods, the American Congregationalist Board was publicly asserting that Rockefeller and Standard's success had been earned legitimately. This acceptance was tantamount to saying that the church accepted and admired Rockefeller's methods.

Gladden saw this "gift" as the perfect opportunity to condemn Standard Oil and Rockefeller within a frame of religious ideology. Evoking use of biblical imagery, Gladden framed the Standard within a larger context. The gigantic Trust represented a dangerous trend in America that represented society's acceptance of corporate abuse. Arguing for the role of religion, Gladden stated, "If the Church is ever going to array itself against the power of Mammon which threatens to undermine morality, paralyze religion, and overthrow liberty, this is the time to bear testimony."<sup>71</sup> Represented as the destruction of all republican values of freedom and liberty, Standard Oil's continued existence would bring about an ideological change in the very structure of American thought. Standard's comparability to the biblical image of Mammon also strongly affirmed that Gladden feared for the worst. The bloated, greedy, and profit driven

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<sup>70</sup> Washington Gladden, "The Church and the Reward of Iniquity," *The Independent*, (20 April 1905), folder 3, box 1, series N, Record Group 2 OMR, Rockefeller Family Archives, RAC.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

demon Mammon represented a subversive threat to American minds.<sup>72</sup> Allowing Standard to continue would be tantamount to allowing the demon to live on in the hearts and minds of the common people. Gladden viewed religion as a buttress against the current developments of the giant corporations and as a shield to protect the common people from the violence and immoral business practices legitimated by success.

Reverend Artemas J. Hayes called for rejection of Rockefeller's donation because he saw Standard Oil as an immoral representative of the evils present in the U.S industrial system. Hayes's use of his Sunday Sermon at his Congregational Church in New Haven illustrated the importance of utilizing a religious (and with that, a moral) framework in which to judge Standard Oil. The presence of legal indictments against the Standard Oil had up until this period of time been marginally successful but had not rescued America from the grip of the Trust. Hayes's refusal to accept the lack of a legal decision allowed him to condemn Standard's guilt. Calling upon his churchgoers to accept the "spirit of protest," Hayes stated, "Here is a company that above all represents what is cruel, extortionate, and unjust in our industrial life."<sup>73</sup> Upon accepting the gift of Rockefeller, Hayes believed, the Congregational Church would be giving Standard its support and legitimacy.<sup>74</sup> Hayes's depiction puts Standard into a larger framework; the pattern of industrial development in the U.S. Standard stands above all other corporations and trusts that abuse the people, for Hayes its image is the supreme achievement of all that is evil in the world. The company's actions define its identity. Hayes wished to keep the church

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<sup>72</sup> "Mammon, n." OED Online. November 2010. Oxford University Press.

<http://www.oed.com.proxy.library.ucsb.edu:2048/view/Entry/113169?redirectedFrom=Mammon> (accessed March 06, 2011).

<sup>73</sup> Artemas Jean Hayes, "The Spirit of Protest" (New Haven, CT on 16 April 1905), folder 3, box 1, series N, RG 2 OMR, Rockefeller Family, RAC.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.



completely separate from corporate abuse, while infusing his congregation with the ability to see Standard's true face.

Hayes was further convinced that Standard Oil had no barriers standing in its way; thus his sermon determined to imbue his listeners with the power to protest the Corporation's presence in American society. Standard's power and might were unstoppable, and with its vast resources it seemed anything was possible. Warning his congregants of Standard's might, he further tore apart the opposing side's argument that, without legal conviction, Standard was innocent. Hayes stated, "if we are to wait for process of law, especially when the creators and executors of law may be but pawns under the thumb of he who plays the game" then evil will inevitably continue to work against the good of the common people and the Standard will continue to abuse and destroy all that is treasured in American tradition.<sup>75</sup> Hayes believed that the Trust was virtually inexorable when it came to the realm of law and that if the common people waited to condemn Standard until the law had had its say, Standard might never be condemned. With this naivety of the people, Standard and other trusts could gain a solidified hold over the American economy, and thus over all of society.

Hayes envisioned Standard's threat to society as having a dangerous effect upon religious institutions. Rockefeller's money represented the power behind the Standard Trust and if this money could work its way into the pockets of churches, it would effectively corrupt them and alienate the common people from their beliefs. The working people were the "spirit" that Hayes believed could powerfully indict Standard. But if religious groups accepted the money, the working people would lose their faith and their faith-inspired "spirit of protest." Hayes goes so

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

far as to suggest that even Rockefeller's presence in the Baptist faith was a threat to Christianity. It was a threat because "His membership in the Christian Church and his alliance with religious organizations have done more than any other single influence to alienate the working man from the Church."<sup>76</sup> Rockefeller's inconsistent identities, that of the businessman and that of the Baptist, were not separate to Hayes, but rather they formed a dangerous individual who could work his influence into any segment of society. Hayes's sermon contained both strength of passion and conviction, revealing his concern for the future path of society and the susceptibility of churches to outside influence.

A Congregational Committee group also sought to frame its objections to Rockefeller's donation in the image of protecting the Church against the sin of association. Standard Oil's business principles were not driven by a guiding moral light but rather by a desire to make massive profit. The committee states that upon receiving word of the donation, which "nothing at the moment seemed more unexpected . . . More to be deplored, than that our denomination should suffer itself to be numbered among the objects of the favor of this donor."<sup>77</sup> Standard used its profit to show favor and to hold sway over any element that could pose a threat to its total success, and this committee was concerned that with this donation their church's voice would be changed forever. Its messages of goodwill and morality would become hypocritical, for its support and continued existence would rely on money that was dishonestly taken. Rockefeller's donation was as a calculated attempt by the Standard Oil Company to buy the support of the Congregationalists.

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Charles L. Noyes, etc. "The Issue before the Church" (Boston: 4 May 1905), folder 3, box 1, series N, RG 2 OMR, Rockefeller Family, RAC.



The Committee's view of the illegitimacy of Standard's earnings was based on their description of the Trust as being at the center of judgment, judgment from the people and from the law. The surrounding atmosphere of accusations and ill-conceived business dealings was enough to align Standard against the moral teachings of the Congregationalist churches. The committee's surprise that the American Congregationalist Board of Foreign Missions would elicit money from one involved in the Trust was disconcerting. The committee sought to take back the Commission's actions, stating that the society "should be careful not to seek or even encourage the giving of this donation from one at the bar of American people with heinous charges and weighty evidence unrefuted, heaping up against him."<sup>78</sup> The mass attention and hysteria directed toward the Trust was enough in the minds of these Committee members to declare it tainted.

The Committee also showed its concern for the duality of Rockefeller's character and the inconsistency represented by his business dealings and his private life as a man of Baptist faith. The committee saw these two contradictory traits as further proof that this man's money should not be accepted. The committee used the term "ethical bimetallism" to describe both Rockefeller's personality and the danger it represented to the church's standing amongst working people. Defining the term, the committee stated, "to see a man of the double standard accepted among the saints, and a distinction permitted between the principles of the business world and of the Christian Church" would effectively alienate the common people from their place in Christianity.<sup>79</sup> Rockefeller's identity as both a man of cruel business practices and of Christianity was a threat to the church and as a threat; any association should be strictly cut off. The

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

committee's concern for the isolation of the common people was mirrored above in Reverend Hayes's concerns as well.

In contrast to a stream of harsh opinions provided by many who wished to see the Church reject such a gift, the voice of *The Broadway Tabernacle Tidings* journal of the Broadway Tabernacle Church sought to understand the vitriol spouted against Rockefeller and Standard Oil as part of a larger pattern present in society. This pattern was the need to condemn all big business and those who had amassed great fortunes as having committed harmful acts against the public. The *Tabernacle* explained, "It is wrong to inflict mob vengeance on a man because he is rich, and because by being more successful than thousands of competitors in the same great game, has stirred venomous abuse of numberless detractors."<sup>80</sup> The journal's support of Rockefeller's donation is enhanced by its attempt to separate Rockefeller's donation from association with the Standard Oil Company. Any reference to Standard's approval or acknowledgement of Rockefeller's donation remained absent. The journal's reference to wider historical patterns and the development of big business also sought to communicate to its members that the size of business was unrelated to its propensity towards moral acts.

The *Tabernacle* continued to espouse its views of the generous donations and sought to understand the evangelical protest in a wider light. The writer's confidence lay in the American Board and its work as the highest idealization of moral good, such that even if the money was dishonest it would still achieve some good in the world.<sup>81</sup> However, the writer's main concern was with society's and more importantly the religious society's reaction to the donation. Offering advice to his readers, he stated that good people should not be "swept from their feet by the

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<sup>80</sup> *Broadway Tabernacle Tidings*, 4 May 1905, NY, Folder 3, Box 1, Series N, RG 2 OMR, Rockefeller Family, RAC.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*



indictments of newspapers or impeachments of irresponsible magazines or the howls of the crowd . . . But to stand calm and firm” in the decision of the American Congregationalist Board.<sup>82</sup> The writer’s faith in the actions and the Board’s ability to do good nullified any argument against Rockefeller’s character. The writer was careful to remain neutral on the accusations of Standard Oil and Rockefeller’s immorality but his reference to the media frenzy illustrates the wider opinion of evangelicals that the public was easily swayed without the guiding influence of the Church.

Reverend Amory H. Bradford’s column, amongst other differing opinions on the Rockefeller questions, gave his consent that the gift should be accepted because of Rockefeller’s own personal religious character and those of high moral standing that he surrounded himself with. The power of association is important in Bradford’s argument because it is used as a way to judge Rockefeller. Bradford explained that the men Rockefeller had selected to be by his side “were men of the loftiest character, of unblemished reputation, of genuine Christian manhood, who no one would dream of charging with complicity in wrong.”<sup>83</sup> The association argument was used to condemn Rockefeller earlier, but Bradford’s belief in the honesty of good men absolved Rockefeller of guilt.

Explaining that Rockefeller’s generous donation was not issued on the premise of agreement or support for Standard Oil further developed Reverend Bradford’s argument. The Committee had admitted that they had sought out Rockefeller’s help and donation in the first place, so it was unlikely that Rockefeller wanted any type of help from the Congregationalists in asserting Standard Oil’s innocence. Bradford states that his donation was not an attempt at

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Amory H. Bradford, “An Approving View”, *The Congregationalist and Christian World* Vol.XC, #16, Folder 1, Box 2, Series N, RG 2 OMR, Rockefeller Family, RAC.

“making the board his partner, and not asking it to give him any approval.”<sup>84</sup> Bradford also left out any reference to the Standard Oil Company’s questionable activities, thus attesting to his belief that Rockefeller and Standard were separate entities and that they were not mutually exclusive terms.

The whirlwind of emotions required a response from John D. Rockefeller and Standard Oil, and it appeared with the publication of an article entitled “Rockefeller says he is not Guilty on Tainted Money Count” published in *The Times*. Communicated in an official statement from the company, it called into moral question the violent and judgmental opinions formulated by men of the cloth. The accusation made against Standard Oil and Rockefeller, “if false, is vile and being made by ministers in the pretended interest of morality is doubly vile.”<sup>85</sup> The statement reminds the reader of the due process of law and that all “assertions should not be made unless it can be readily established by specification and proof” that Standard Oil and Rockefeller are guilty of wrongdoing.<sup>86</sup> The concern that the press and opinion were too quick to judge reveals the harsh environment that Standard created for itself by lacking a concerted effort to offer information about the company’s actions.

The storm of controversy caused by Rockefeller’s donation to the American Congregationalist Board of Foreign Mission revealed the air of suspicion and doubt present in the public sector towards any business of the size and strength of Standard. This doubt and concern was present throughout the evangelical sector, a fact that was illuminated by the debate on “tainted money.” Rockefeller’s relationship to the Standard Oil Company was used to

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> “Rockefeller Says he is Not Guilty on Tainted Money Count,” *The Times* Vol. LXXII, No. 219 (7 April 1905), folder 886, box 118, C. Business, RG 2 OMR, Rockefeller Family, RAC.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.



severely denigrate his own moral standing, while serving to accuse him of the crime of association. The reverse can be said of those journals and writers who supported the donation as revealing that Rockefeller's character was strengthened and absolved by the strong Christian men in which he chose to surround himself. Overall, the fears and apprehension society faced at the inception of a new larger than life industry were strongly mirrored in the Church.

*Congressional Depictions: An Investigation into Trusts*

Growing unrest over the presence of larger than life business corporations spawned discussion on the role these big business would play in the coming years. Influenced by the vehement public reaction, Congressional hearings and investigations into different business trusts was a concerted effort on the government's part to understand the role the combination would play in the United States economy. Apart from a small number of state antimonopoly laws, corporate regulation consisted of "ill-defined and difficult to enforce concepts of common law."<sup>87</sup> Concerned with the position of the independent businessmen, the 50<sup>th</sup> Congress held an investigation into the methods of trusts on July 3, 1888. Seeking out testimony from independent refiners, producers, and transporters, the investigations were driven to document the existence of monopolies and to discover whether legislative control would be necessary. Congressional concerns were refocused in 1906 on the presence of price discriminations and railroad rebates, all advantages that Standard used to increase its sway over the petroleum industry. Through Congressional investigations and hearings, Standard's image was tainted with the evidence of its wrongdoing.

The Committee on Manufacturer's concerns involved analyzing the Standard Oil's vast combination's effects on the small independent refiners. Their investigations sought out testimonies from all manner of independent businessmen involved in the petroleum industry. In the case of Standard Oil, the committee proved the harmful presence of the trust upon independent businessmen. Utilizing the "trust...in that capacity, either fixed the price or

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<sup>87</sup> Alfred Chandler Jr., *The Visible Hand* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1977), 316.



regulated the production of any article or merchandise or commerce.”<sup>88</sup> Focused on displaying the effect that monopoly had upon natural resources, the Committee on Manufacturer seemed to find Standard as the perfect fit.

Standard Oil’s use of the trust form had allowed it to take complete control of the transportation sector within the petroleum industry. The Standard’s sway over the railroads and its investment and ownership of the direct pipelines from crude oil wells directly to refining factories supplied it with seemingly unlimited power. The cooptation of multiple methods of transport proved challenging to the presence and success of independent businessmen in the industry. David Kirk, a small oil producer from Bradford, explained Standard’s crippling control over the transportation sector. Asked to explain the difficulties producers faced getting their oil to market, Kirk stated, “They are dependent upon the Standard Oil Company.... Nearly all, I would say 95% of our oil is transported by the Standard Oil Company.”<sup>89</sup> With control over such a large percentage of oil traffic, the Standard was in a position to utilize its resources to make the survival of independent refiners very difficult. Imagined as holding the keys to power, Standard also seemed to hold the keys to the fates of many fellow oil businesses.

With a monopoly over the transportation companies in the petroleum industry, Standard used its power to destroy the independent producer’s right to compete in a fair market. With controlling shares in various transportation, shipment companies, and pipelines, Standard put immense pressure on to those it perceived as rivals. Seeking to better understand Standard’s methods, the Committee asked Kirk, “Has it been within your observation, the policy of the Standard Oil and its allies, to drive out or freeze out, as you expressed it awhile ago, all

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<sup>88</sup> *Trust: Committee on Manufactures Report*, 50<sup>th</sup> Cong (1888), Serial Set Vol. No.2606, Session Vol. No. 9 50<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> session H. Rpt. 3112 (Archive of Americanaj, II-III).

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

competition in the transportation of Oil?"<sup>90</sup> With Kirk's affirmative answer, Standard's image had been painted in the colors of an insidious, corrupt trust determined to monopolize the industry and control the supply of a necessity of life. Standard's pressure and use of its monopoly over transportation allowed it to stop competition in its tracks.

Reticent to let in any new competitors, Standard Oil used its monopoly powers to successfully block many new independent businesses from entry into the petroleum industry and inhibit their chances for success. From the experience of a producer, Kirk had seen first hand the devices employed by the Standard. Throwing around its weight, Standard "threw every obstacle in the way of reaching a railroad or getting where an independent man could get" access to transport his finished product.<sup>91</sup> Stuck with refined oil and no channel to transport it to market, businesses failed quickly. The hard image of the oil industry became symbolic of Standard's power over the fates of new businesses seeking success in a particular industry.

Producers also turned to organizations within the petroleum industry in order to find a way to continue and safeguard their businesses from Standard's menacing position. Representing a producers' union, A.L.N Bennett expressed the dire circumstances in which he and his fellow producers had been forced to band together. Responding to a question asking for an explanation for the need of "protection against the Standard Oil Company," Bennett replied, "because the Standard Oil Company had secured virtually a monopoly of the transportation, refining, purchase, and sale of" oil.<sup>92</sup> Standard's threat induced many producers and refiners to band together.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 45-46.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 32.



While the focus of the 1888 Committee on Manufactures was focused on creating Standard's image based on its predatory methods and monopolization, the later Bureau of Corporation's investigation sought to evaluate Standard's reliance on rate discriminations. As Commissioner of Corporations, Garfield transmitted the bureau's findings to President Theodore Roosevelt, who delivered the findings to Congress in May 1906. Originally concerned with reporting on the condition of the Kansas oil fields, the Bureau decided that it needed to investigate the oil industry as a whole, paying particular attention to "the control and cost of refineries... the organization, ownership... of the companies... and the competitive methods used in the production and sale of oil."<sup>93</sup> Standard's immense influence over the petroleum industry guaranteed its central part in the Bureau's conclusions.

Finding evidence through the railroad companies' ledgers, the Committee saw Standard Oil Company's use of the special discrimination and secret rebate unjust. In the face of the Bureau's accusations, Standard attempted to defend its success. The Bureau stated, "Standard claims that the location of its refineries and the use of the pipe lines are natural advantages to which it is justly entitled by reason of the energy and foresight of its managers."<sup>94</sup> However, the Bureau refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of Standard's defensive statement. Viewing the company's statement as containing some truth, the bureau contested it by stating, "It must not be forgotten that these advantages were in part obtained by means of unfair competitive methods after years and years of industrial strife."<sup>95</sup> Standard's success was ultimately won through unjust methods of receiving rebates and special rates

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<sup>93</sup> "Report and Message against Standard Oil," *New York Times* (1857-1922), May 5, 1906, <http://www.proquest.com> (Accessed March 1, 2011).

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

Analyzing the effects of special discrimination and railroad rebates, the Bureau sought to illustrate the direct relationship between the unjust discounts and Standard's monopoly control over a large portion of the oil industry. The report admitted to the presence of some advantages, but it placed the majority of the burden upon the unjust advantage gained through receiving discounted freight charges. As Standard continued to amass in growth and wealth, the continuing receipt of railroad favors allowed the Standard power over oil. The report stated, "These so called advantages have been and are being greatly increased by discriminations in freight rates...which give the Standard monopolistic control."<sup>96</sup> By connecting the survival of the price discrimination system with Standard's growing power over the industry, the Bureau's report pressured Congress for action by commenting on whether Standard's competitive methods were ultimately fair or unfair.

The Bureau's reported investigation sought to not only illustrate Standard Oil's corruption and unjust methods but also frame it as currently in violation of the Interstate Commerce Commission Act. Standard's ability to get past the weak law in the company's mind affirmed the validity of its actions. However, the bureau's published findings served to illustrate to Congress the reality of the situation. Clearly defective and useless, the law needed new focus and strength to keep the Corporation in check.<sup>97</sup> Looking to future laws and the clearer, more outlined image of proper business roles, actions, and qualities, Standard was far from Congress' favor.

The 1888 Commission on Manufactures' report to the House sought to depict Standard as cruel, monopolistic predator displayed in the emotional stories of many independent

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.



businessmen. Motivated by the need to inspire change to bring about the strengthening of interstate law, the 1906 Bureau of Corporation's report provided President Roosevelt and Congress the image they had most been craving, that of a bloated, unjust, dishonest company that violated the liberal requirement of fair access to the market for all producers. The continued strength of investigative committee reports on the presence of the Standard Oil Trust in America revealed the remaining need for many Americans to come to terms with the changing future.

*Presidential Reactions: President Theodore Roosevelt*

Visages of the Standard Oil Company spread like wildfire throughout the media, eventually eclipsing the public debate and landing itself a front and center spot in President Roosevelt's administration. Forever worried about the rise of wealth and corporate abuse, Roosevelt saw the Standard Oil Company as a preview of big business's path without government regulation. Roosevelt's depiction of the Standard was developed in two statements made to Congress entitled "Railway Rates and the Standard Oil Company" in 1906 and "Campaign Against Privilege" in 1908. His statements followed the publication of the Bureau of Corporation's investigation into Standard Oil's business methods, confirming the company's use of secret railway rebates. Roosevelt's Standard Oil was predatory, dishonest, and an immoral evil towards both the public and independent businesses. Referring specifically to on its use of secret railway rebates, Roosevelt stood firm in his opinion that the Standard Oil Company was a threat to the values of American society.

The Standard Oil Company's use of secret railroad rates allowed it to gain large profits at the expense of the railroad companies and the public. Roosevelt saw the company as a threat to other companies and the public. In "Railway Rates and the Standard Oil Company," Roosevelt showed concern for railroad companies that were practically forced to acquiesce to Standard Oil's pressure for low shipping rates. Roosevelt saw Standard as such a threat that he called on Congress to delegate more power to the Interstate Commerce Commission and to allow it to approve "proper combinations." Roosevelt believed that the railroads should be allowed to unite, "that is for purposes of protection to themselves and the general public as against the power of



the great corporations.”<sup>98</sup> His statements showed his concern for the wellbeing of independent companies who came into contact with the Standard Oil Company. For Roosevelt to remark that the railroad companies needed to be watched closely and potentially allowed to combine in order to protect its stockholders’ interests revealed his fear of the Standard’s capabilities. Not only was the existence of railroad rates enough to illicit concern in Roosevelt’s mind, but he also showed concern for Standard’s effect on the public.

Roosevelt saw the Standard Oil Company’s gargantuan size and use of the secret rates as evidence that it had illegally and unjustly swollen its profits. The Bureau of Corporations had estimated that the Standard had benefitted from these rates, allowing it to earn in excess “three-quarters of a million” per year (independent of its actual earned profits). Standard’s bloated profits were evidence of what it had taken from the public. Roosevelt expressed his belief that Standard was a public enemy when he stated, “The ultimate result is that it maintains a much larger profit at the expense of the public.”<sup>99</sup> With access to discounted shipping rates, Standard Oil lowered its prices to a point where other independent refiners could not compete.

Wielding its monopoly power and railway rates, Standard seemed unstoppable and Roosevelt was concerned how diminished competition was affecting the public. Standard had successfully cut out any effective threats to its business prowess by ruthlessly slashing its prices. But how did the public fare once Standard was in full control of the market? Undermining the free market system, Standard set the prices high enough that the company charged “from three to four hundred thousand dollars a year more to the consumers of oil in New England than they

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<sup>98</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, “Railway Rates and the Standard Oil Company,” in *The Roosevelt Policy* (New York: Current Literature Publishing Co., 1908), 2:382-383

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 379-380.

would have had to pay had the price" been set in a competitive market.<sup>100</sup> Standard was unjustly robbing the market and the people by undermining the right to competitive pricing. Without competition, Standard was setting the rates higher than the norm, a rate that many were forced to pay just because of where they lived. Standard's profits were unjustly taken from the people, while it continued to undermine the capitalist system. Roosevelt saw Standard as an evil profit-monger, thirsting off of its consumers.

The plight of the small independent refiner also impassioned Roosevelt, who saw the Standard as a threat to freedom and American individualism. With the help of the railway rates and effective (and yet brutal) price cuts, Standard destroyed the competitive nature of the oil industry. As small refineries were outsold and bought out, Standard slowly absorbed these companies under its board of trustees. Roosevelt saw the partnership between the railroads and the Standard as the origin of Standard's illicit business dealings. Roosevelt showed immense concern over the perpetuation of "a system in which the big shipper and the railroad are left free to crush out all individual initiative and all power of independent action."<sup>101</sup> Standard's illegal activities undermined the role of the individual in the United States. Standard did not represent a partnership or the interests of one man; rather it represented the interests of a board of trustees and stockholders. Narrowing the field of independent companies, Standard was laying waste to a business sector that had previously allowed individual growth and independent action. Roosevelt's concern was for the health of the republic, and if small businessmen had no place in this new economic system of injustice and dishonesty, Roosevelt feared the worst.

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 380-381.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 381.



Roosevelt identified Standard Oil as being a part of a larger problem involving the development of wealth in his congressional statement, entitled "Campaign against Privilege." Using predatory methods to amass profit, Standard was another example of a corporation "gone wrong" and Roosevelt was concerned that Standard had many devious connections into various sections of society, including both government and media. The influence of corrupt wealth and greed added color to Roosevelt's Standard face. Attempting to undermine the law, Roosevelt saw the Standard as a dangerous precedent. Standard men and other corporate tycoons "whose conduct should be abhorrent to every man... [c]ommitted the hideous wrong of teaching our young men that phenomenal business success... must be based on dishonesty."<sup>102</sup> The dangerous example set by the greedy corporate world, a world represented by Standard, was a serious threat.

Not only did Roosevelt find Standard's business strategies predatory, but he also saw the company's obvious disregard for the legal system as a dangerous corporate precedent. Roosevelt's "trust-busting" identity and Congress' move towards enacting more anti-trust legislation as a result of the Bureau of Corporations' findings revealed that Congress and the President were determined to take a stand against corrupt corporations. Many believed that the plot to dismember the Standard Oil Company was drawn up within the White House walls.<sup>103</sup> Roosevelt equated Standard and other (but not all) monopolistic corporations as endeavoring "to overthrow and discredit all who honestly administer the law, to prevent any additional legislation which would check and restrain them, and to secure... a freedom from all restraint."<sup>104</sup> Endeavoring to keep its position over the oil industry, Standard was concerned about pending

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<sup>102</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, "Campaign against Privilege" in *The Roosevelt Policy*, 715-716.

<sup>103</sup> Albert Z. Carr, *John D. Rockefeller's Secret Weapon* (New York: McGraw-Hill Books, 1962), 148.

<sup>104</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, "Campaign against Privilege" in *The Roosevelt Policy*, 716.

laws. Roosevelt saw Standard actions as a direct threat to the law and the duties of Congress and the President.

Roosevelt's depiction of Standard's illegal activities also drew upon arguments of morality and its proper place in the business sector. Predatory business measures used to undercut independent refiners and secret railway rates that led to monopolistic gain were all prime examples of Standard's immorality and iniquity. Business and moral standards were not mutually exclusive, but rather businesses needed ethics in order to operate justly within society. Roosevelt stated, business "has a large economic side, but it is fundamentally an ethical movement... We do not subscribe to the cynical belief that dishonesty and unfair dealings are essential to business success."<sup>105</sup> Roosevelt perceived his own actions and those of Congress as striving to keep the place of morality and ethical standards present in the business sector. Standard was the antithesis to any business that employed some semblance of moral wherewithal. The Standard Oil Company's activities and wealth, he insisted, "can only be justified by the advocacy of a system of morality which would also justify every form of criminality.... And every form of violence, corruption, and fraud, from murder to bribery."<sup>106</sup> Standard's monopoly control allowed it to use immoral business methods to crush its fellow competitive refineries. Standard's actions made a mockery of ethical business standards.

Roosevelt's fears were crystallized in Standard Oil's identity. His fears of corrupt corporations effectively changing the makeup of American values based in freedom and individualism proved a reality in his descriptions of Standard. Guilty of undermining competitive markets and relying on illegal railway rates, Standard had committed treasonous offenses.

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 729.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 729.



Roosevelt even expressed belief that railroad companies were at the mercy of the Standard power when he suggested that Congress imbue the I.C.C. with the power to approve some beneficial combinations. Serving to represent the pinnacle of dishonest wealth and corrupt actions, Standard had found its match in the form of the government.

*Depiction from Within: Standard Oil Company's Own Image*

Assaulted through the press and threatened by pending antitrust legislation, Standard Oil's image during the early nineteenth century took a severe beating. A letter addressed to the Standard Oil offices at 26 Broadway street, NY from a small town newspaper editor had correctly remarked, "One man connected with your business that knew how to handle the press... would be worth a pile of money to you."<sup>107</sup> With this sentiment in mind, the Standard attempted to develop its own image in the press. In letters between board members, Standard conveyed that the press was aligned against them, unfairly against them. John D. Archbold, another Standard Oil man, spoke out through the press and through his personal letters, asserting his view that the Standard was a benevolent company. Espousing views on the benefits of the combination form of business, the Standard and Rockefeller were convinced that the public's harsh views were really channeled towards their fear and misunderstanding of the new big business element in society.

John D. Rockefeller's published writings taken from both newspaper interviews and his own published musings entitled, *Random Reminiscences of Men and Events* were focused on illustrating the trust or corporate form of business in a positive light. The rise of giant industries and multi-million dollar corporations (especially in the form of the Steel and Sugar trusts) starkly contrasted to the traditional model of independent businessmen and partnerships. Rockefeller wished to rid the public's sentiment involving the denigration of the corporation. In an interview published in *The New York Times*, entitled "Rockefeller says Trusts will become the Toiler's Savings Banks," he asserted the important role combinations would have in the future of

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<sup>107</sup> Ivan G. English to Starr J. Murphy, August 14, 1908, folder 864, folder 115, series C, record group 2 OMR, Rockefeller Family Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, NY.



business. Rockefeller stated, "The industrial combination has become a fixed feature of economic scene.... Only through combination and co-operation can an even balance be maintained."<sup>108</sup> Asserting the balance and usefulness of the corporate structure, Rockefeller attempted to draw a positive image of the combination. The introduction of cooperation also developed a positive image of working together and creating an environment of support and mutual friendship.

Concerned with the public's quickness to judge a business based on its structure and size, Rockefeller sought to explain that the corporate form deserved a chance to earn the public's trust. Discussing the importance of the development of big business, Rockefeller hoped to see the public come to the realization that the trust was here to stay. However, this realization would come when the "problems which confront us will be discussed with fairness and intelligence and settled not on the basis of... agitation but in the spirit... of fair-minded Americans without rancor or bias."<sup>109</sup> Alluding to the cruel evaluations of the Standard at the hands of the public, Rockefeller sought to persuade readers that their opinions had not been fairly formed. Standard's use of the combination form allowed it to amass large profits and to control various steps in the process of refining petroleum. Many Standard employees expressed surprise and concern over the public's hasty judgment on the company's identity. Rockefeller's actions and his statements on the benevolent trust form of business revealed his belief that the public negative view of the company was a reaction to the changing culture of big business.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> William Hoster and John D. Rockefeller, "Rockefeller says Trusts will become Toiler's Savings Banks," *New York Times*, September 29, 1907, folder 865, box 115, series C, RG 2 OMR, Rockefeller Family Archive, RAC.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Albert Z. Carr, *John D. Rockefeller's Secret Weapon* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company: 1962), 70.



Rockefeller's own published writings, entitled *Random Reminiscences of Men and Events* attempted to ease the public's mind when it came to the changing nature of the American business industry. In a chapter entitled, "The Standard Oil Company," Rockefeller conveniently expounded upon the beneficial characteristics of the Standard form. Attempting to show continuity between the partnership structure and the expanded combination, he stated, "Much that one man cannot do alone two can do together, and once admit the fact that cooperation, or, what is the same thing, combination, is necessary on a small scale."<sup>111</sup> By presenting the idea of the trust or combination as invoking a characteristic present in smaller partner based businesses, Rockefeller is asserting that the ideals of a combination have been an important part of the business sector. By connecting the Standard's use of combination into a longer narrative of business development, Rockefeller hoped to illustrate Standard as a natural product of the economy.

Developing Standard's image along the lines of a supportive business focused on co-operation, Rockefeller attempted to cultivate the image of hardworking, driven group of men. Perhaps answering to accusations of special treatment from the railroad company, he affirmed that the Standard Oil Company was an honest success story. Framing Standard's success within the positive elements of combination, he stated, "The Standard has not now, and never did have a royal road to supremacy, nor is its success due to any one man, but the multitude of able men who are working together."<sup>112</sup> Representing Standard as a large company made up of individual businessmen working together worked to lessen the intimidating qualities held by the gargantuan company.

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<sup>111</sup> John D. Rockefeller, *Random Reminiscences of Men and Events* (New York: Doubleday and Page, 1909), 66.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.



In addition to developing a benevolent image of the Standard's trust form, the Standard oilmen were concerned with showing their company's actions in a positive light. The Standard received a lot of criticism detailing the company's cruel competitive methods. The destruction of the independent refiner was among the bread and butter of the newspapermen. Contesting this image in a newspaper interview, John D. Archbold attempted to frame Standard's actions in a different light. During the *Standard Oil Company of New Jersey v. United States*, Archbold commented on his view of Standard's actions. Reproduced in a *New York Times* article, entitled "Rivals 'Absorbed' by Standard Oil," Archbold's testimony revealed the company's own attempt to frame its actions as charitable and moral. Archbold stated, "The Standard did not compel them [independent refiners] to shut up shop and go into bankruptcy, as it could easily have done, but simply bought them out."<sup>113</sup> Archbold attempted to give the Trust's activities a moral frame of reference. Graciously paying its failing competitors, Standard was showing its humanity.

Also showing concern for answering questions of why Standard had gained such fast control over many other failing countries, Archbold attempted to explain the role a harsh, powerful market had in the independents' failures. Archbold stated, "The natural evolution of the business led us into buying up those concerns rather than crowding them out, which we might easily have done... Usually we bought them at... a fair price."<sup>114</sup> Taking the blame from Standard's shoulders, Archbold instead focused on the role of the natural market. Standard simply was a successful competitor who could withstand the market pressures. Archbold's testimony revealed Standard's attempt to illustrate its competitive methods as not an example of monopoly but rather of benevolent action.

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<sup>113</sup> "Rivals 'Absorbed' by Standard Oil," *New York Times* (1857-1922), <http://www.proquest.com> (Accessed March 1, 2011).

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

Restraint of trade became a larger issue for Standard in front of the Supreme Court of the United States, but privately the oilmen felt that their “restraint of trade” was beneficial to the economy and to labor. In a letter to John D. Archbold, Starr J. Murphy reflected on his frustration with the media’s depiction of the negative aspects of the restraint of trade principle. Media outlets and the Sherman Antitrust Act seemed to allow no room for Murphy’s “benevolent” restraint of trade ideals. Yet Standard’s restraint of trade was a positive, in Murphy’s eyes, because it “consists of bringing in hundreds of millions of dollars... to be distributed in wages to the American workingmen and in dividends to American investors.”<sup>115</sup> Focusing on the opportunities Standard has brought to the working class and to its investors, Murphy saw Standard as a successful American business. Refusing to believe that companies labeled as in restraint of trade brought nothing of value to the economy was, in Murphy’s mind, ridiculous. To him, the public only saw the opposite result, the result of destruction.<sup>116</sup> Standard’s business brought opportunity to the people, and the oilmen’s frustration was that very few seemed to view Standard in this benevolent light.

Rockefeller also found the need to offer his manner on characterizing Standard’s competitive methods. Seeing his company as the first to break away from the traditional refinery business methods, he felt that the company’s negative image was not deserved. With the right to become successful, Rockefeller created Standard’s image along the lines of an innocent victim whose success had incurred jealousy.<sup>117</sup> Innocent imaginings aside, Rockefeller also saw Standard’s competitive practices as legitimate. In response to the criticism of predatory action, he wrote that Standard’s business methods were “done in a fair spirit and with due consideration

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<sup>115</sup> Murphy to Archbold, December 6, 1907, box 864, folder 115, series C, RG 20MR, Rockefeller Family Archives, RAC.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> John D. Rockefeller, *Random Reminiscences of Men and Events*, 58.



for every one's rights. We did not ruthlessly go after the trade of our competitors and attempt to ruin it by cutting prices or instituting a spy system."<sup>118</sup> Viewing Standard as an innocent yet successful company, Rockefeller attempted to create the image of a just and honest corporation. Rockefeller's direct language helped to show the Standard had nothing to hide from the public or the government.

Developing Standard's image also required acknowledgement of the rebate and secret rates the company had received from the railroad companies. Innocent of any wrongdoing, its leader claimed, Standard had simply taken advantage of railroad companies' offers. Rockefeller framed the rebate system as a symbol of Standard's generosity and focus on bringing success to the railroad companies. Explaining Standard's generous contracts with the railroad companies, Rockefeller contended that the "traffic from the Standard Oil Company was far more profitable to the railroad companies than the smaller and irregular traffic, which might have paid a higher rate."<sup>119</sup> Standard was allowing the railroad companies the chance to profit from its business. Seemingly improbably, Standard was sharing its generosity. Larger shipments were worth more money to the railroad companies because of their lower unit costs, so it seemed natural to see the rebate system as a railroad companies' ploy to achieve more wealth and business.

Standard's image was further moralized by Rockefeller's argument that rebates ultimately benefitted the public. Although Standard's business gave railroad companies the chance to profit, Standard's acceptance was also morally motivated. Standard Oil's consumers were on the receiving end of these railroad rebates as well. Affirming that the Standard had not in fact benefitted all that much from its special rates, Rockefeller stated, "whatever advantage it

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 108.

received in its constant efforts to reduce rates of freight was only one of the many elements of lessening the cost to the consumer which enabled us to increase" in profit.<sup>120</sup> Illustrating Standard's business savvy actions in the frame of helping the consumer created and sustained Rockefeller's image of the benevolent trust. With the public at heart, Standard represented the corporate pinnacle of morality.

Although Standard's premier oilmen saw their actions and that of their company as legitimate and morally in tune, they nevertheless noticed the harsh public outcry against them daily in newspapers and magazines. Ida M. Tarbell's very popular serialized history on the Standard Oil Company was one case in point. Writing to a Standard employee, Rockefeller referenced her work, stating "My impression is that Miss. Tarbell has, or is able to procure, correct information, and that if she conveys impressions in her articles which are incorrect, it is because of a premeditated desire to do harm."<sup>121</sup> Reacting to her caustic depiction, Rockefeller viewed her intentions as dishonest and unfair. His reactions to various newspaper publications illustrated his bewilderment and frustration at the Standard's public image. Remarking that many press reports did "seem a little tuff"; Rockefeller persevered to help build up his company.<sup>122</sup>

The Standard Oil Company's frustration at the difficulty of creating a positive public image was also expressed in employee and stockholder pamphlets. Directly publishing these pamphlets and distributing them amongst its employees and stockholders allowed the company to express its own views of the press's and government's treatment. In reaction to the surge of public dislike, the pamphlet stated, "So persistent and adroit has been the warfare waged with all

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>121</sup> Rockefeller to Prentice, December 4, 1902, folder 864, box 115, series C, RG 2OMR, Rockefeller Family Archives, RAC.

<sup>122</sup> Rockefeller note, May 5, 1902, folder 865, box 115, series C, RG 2 OMR, Rockefeller Family Archives, RAC.



the overpowering authority of the Federal Administration against the Standard Oil Company, that is had been manifestly difficult to get a fair hearing before the public or in a large portion of the press, the latter to its great harm, swayed alike by socialistic from below and political pressure from above."<sup>123</sup> Standard's pamphlet showed its concern for the effect the company's negative public image could have upon its stockholders and its employees. Standard sought to explain itself as undeserving of this attention and the various negative images given to it. The reference to socialistic influence also helped align Standard with democracy and American patriotism.

Standard Oil Company celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in January of 1920. The Company's new publication entitled *The Lamp*, a magazine for Standard's employees and stockholders, devoted a large portion of its issue to an article titled "Fifty Years of Oil." Celebrating its founding, the publication pulled from its past to offer a glorified image of the first Standard. Focusing on Standard's organizational brilliance and its propensity for ahead of its time methods, the company was still depicted within highly moralistic terms involving its work for the public.

In the anniversary profile, Standard was responsible for helping create the image of American success and technological advances. Focusing on the organization of the company remained an important priority. In grandiose, eloquent language, Standard had helped win America's first place in the world. *The Lamp* explained, "One of the real achievements of the United States in the last fifty years, one in which we justly claim superiority over other nations,

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<sup>123</sup> "From the Directors of the Standard Oil Company: To Its Employees and Stockholders," August 1907, p.3-4, folder 885, box 115, series C, RG 2 OMR, Rockefeller Family Archives, RAC.

is the organization, the co-ordination, and standardization of industry.”<sup>124</sup> Relying on patriotic language, Standard was affirming its role in developing new, more efficient forms of business. A representative of American innovation, the Standard’s written history sought to cover over the unpleasant facts of the company’s past.

Unwilling to gloss over the company’s past involvement with the controversial railroad rebates, the commemorative article explained Standard’s advantages as a part of a normal practice of the era. Standard Oil’s role in the petroleum industry as the largest customer meant that it could take advantage of certain practices. “In the early days of the enterprise the theory of the railroad business was...that the biggest customer was entitled to the best treatment...,” went the argument. “Standard Oil was favored.” But when the Interstate Commerce Commission outlawed rate discriminations, “the Company gladly abandoned the system.”<sup>125</sup> Standard’s respect for the new law allowed it to bolster its image as a patriotic and respectful company that played by society’s rules. The omission of any reference to Standard’s negative press coverage or its dissolution at the hands of the Supreme Court conveniently was left out of this celebratory history.

To solidify Standard’s lasting public image, the history also showcased the benefits Standard bestowed upon the public. The innovative and legally respectful company was also morally motivated to bring better products at lower prices to the public. Standard’s methods and organization allowed it to better effect change in the public realm. Its efficient methods allowed the “consumers of oil, the people at large... to buy products of petroleum at a low price... All of this has been done by intelligent, efficient, co-operation and savings, by constantly broadening

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<sup>124</sup> *The Lamp*, January, 1920, Vol. 2, No. 5, p. 6, folder 866, box 115, series C, RG 20MR, Rockefeller Archive Center, RAC.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.



the field of usefulness while reaping a moderate profit.”<sup>126</sup> Both modestly and morally framed, Standard’s intentions were to be remembered as being driven by goodness and an upstanding commitment to bettering society.

Painting a highly colorful yet controversial image of the billion-dollar company, Standard’s oilmen illustrated their strong views of Standard’s achievements. Defending the large and immense organizational structure, Rockefeller saw society’s fears of change and big business as preventing Standard’s public acceptance. The personal correspondence between Rockefeller, Archbold, and other Standard employees illustrated their strong beliefs towards the harshly biased views of the media. Answering to charges of dishonesty and predatory actions, the Standard men developed their company’s image in the form of a highly innovative, efficient, and benevolent trust. Standard Oil’s celebratory twenty-year anniversary statement served to affirm the company’s dedication to upholding its successful image, while glossing over the smaller, yet pivotal details of an angry public, an aggressive government, and a powerful Supreme Court decision.

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 6.

*A Supreme Court Opinion*

Vivid illustrations and written depictions of the Standard Oil Company paled in comparison to the power behind the Supreme Court's ruling in *Standard Oil Company of New Jersey v. the United States*. The legal force behind the Supreme Court's majority opinion succeeded in permanently affixing one strong identity to Standard Oil. To comply with the Sherman Antitrust Act, Standard Oil was given six months to dissolve its combination. Justice Edward White's majority opinion defined Standard's identity in terms of a variety of different traits. The Court's opinion sought to identify the intentions of its founders and the competitive practices it used to gain control of over ninety per cent of the petroleum industry. Founded with intent to monopolize by cheating which the company hid in the language of efficient business practices, the court held, the company utilized predatory methods to restrict others' rights to freedom of trade.

The Sherman Antitrust Law determined the Court's preoccupation with proving the intentions behind Standard Oil's formation and its actions. As reproduced in the opinion, the antitrust law stated, "Every person who shall monopolize or attempt to monopolize, or combine or conspire with any other person or persons, to monopolize any part of the trade" is guilty.<sup>127</sup> The importance of determining intention received much attention in Chief Justice White's opinion. The discovery of intention enabled the Supreme Court to discuss the role that Standard's evolution, large capital of stocks, and predation ultimately had on its success.

The Supreme Court's description of Standard Oil's predatory business methods affirmed the Court's belief that the company had been created with the intention to monopolize the

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<sup>127</sup> *Standard Oil Company of New Jersey v. United States*, 1911, U.S. Lexis 1725 (May 15, 1911), 27.



petroleum industry. Standard's predation operated on every level of the petroleum industry. By taking control of the various levels of the refinery process, Standard could earn preferential rates from railroads and set the price for refined oil so low that other independent refineries could not compete. Standard's defense team hid behind arguments of reasonable efficiency. From Standard Oil's perspective, any company or man "may use all the weapons that his ingenuity and skill can suggest, to wage a successful warfare."<sup>128</sup> Standard Oil's argument was further aimed at striking down the legitimacy of the Sherman Antitrust Act. In Standard Oil Company's plan, giant and efficient went hand in hand. The defense stated that "under the court's ruling the effectiveness of a large business organization may by reasons of that very fact, bring it under the Sherman Act."<sup>129</sup> The defense team attempted to portray Standard as being punished merely for its superior and highly evolved and efficient business methods, but the Supreme Court did not accept this contention.

The Court shot down Standard's claims of superior efficiency in favor of an image depicting a profit hungry corporation that used unfair modes of competition to achieve a larger than life monopoly. Standard used price cuts, railroad rebates, and stock and pipeline control to push out the independent men from the petroleum industry. The moral overtone present in Chief Justice White's explanations revealed the Court's connection between immorality in business practices and monopolization. With the power of control over transportation behind it, Standard "obtained many, if not virtually all, competitors [who] were forced either to become members of the combination or were driven out of business."<sup>130</sup> The small independent refiner had no chance

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 18.

against the monopolistic company that could dictate price and control transportation and holding facilities. The Court began to apply immoral adjectives to the image of a monopoly.

The Court's concern with the monopoly's effect on the public and the moral implications of a giant Trust also aided them in their indictment of Standard Oil's guilt. Depictions of immoral and predatory behavior on the part of Standard provided the Court with more evidence that Standard was in the business of restraining trade. White stated, "The combination took its birth in a purpose to unlawfully acquire wealth by oppressing the public and destroying the just rights of others."<sup>131</sup> Standard's competitive measures were a threat to the liberty and freedom of trade guaranteed to every individual under the Constitution. Standard's actions reveal both its lack of moral balance and its intent to raze any individual's right to compete in the petroleum industry.

The strong moral overtones of White's opinion revealed the Court's troubling thoughts on what the monopoly form of business could mean for individual independent businessmen. The public good was at stake for White and the majority of the justices. The Standard's control over the petroleum industry enabled it to ignore any moral accountability or standards. The Court affirmed, "Its infinite potency for harm and the dangerous example which its continued existence affords, is an open and enduring menace."<sup>132</sup> Standard lacked a conscience and, without any business regulations under the law until the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890, it had become used to its power and sway over the industry.

The Supreme Court's focus was on the process by which Standard amassed its majority shareholding positions in over thirty-seven other companies achieved in an unnatural way. The

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.



Standard Oil Company's attempt to portray its achievements in a natural light was directly refuted by the Court's opinion that it utilized predatory and immoral methods to bolster its strength. Standard had its hold "over the oil industry, not as a result of normal methods of industrial development, but by new means of combination which were resorted to in order that greater power might be added," power that would not have been achieved through the normal methods of competition.<sup>133</sup> The importance of the court in determining the evolution of Standard helped to affirm the Court's final verdict as guilty because it had no defense under the rule of reason. The Standard Oil's failure to rely on efficient, natural measures of capital aggregation won it no right under the rule of reason.

At the close of 1911, the Supreme Court had given the Standard Oil Company its life expectancy. With six months for dissolution, the end of an era was symbolized in Standard's defeat. The Supreme Court's focus on creating a rule of reason sought to take away the company's attempts at portraying itself with a fair light. The lasting image of the Standard Oil Company was immortalized in the Supreme Court's ruling ensuring that the image of the Trust would be forever framed in terms of its violation of standards of morality, fair competition, and true productive efficiency.

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 38.

### *Shifting Ideologies and Modern Liberalism*

Visions of giants, monsters, and corrupt rich oilmen danced before the public's eye as the Standard Oil Company found its reflection amongst the both public and private sectors of the United States. The powerful response of the public sector took the Standard men by surprise. Buffeted by accusations of corruption, immorality, and cruelty, Standard saw its negative qualities spread like wildfire through press clippings and attention grabbing headlines. However, Standard Oil did have supporters who sought to label its success as the model of the great American business and as representative of the dawning of a new economic day.

The pluralistic opinions presented through the public press sector involved images created through magazine articles, newspaper headlines, investigative books, and political cartoons. Overwhelmingly attuned to sensational and human-interest stories, the press severely abused the Standard Oil Company. Accusations of too big, too powerful, and too corrupt served to alienate Standard from working within the U.S. economy. Using its power to achieve illegal discounts and its extreme wealth to push out smaller competitors, Standard created fear for the survival of the republic. Nowhere could this sentiment of be more clearly expressed than in Lloyd's *Wealth against Commonwealth*, which passionately depicted Standard's offenses as a danger to the liberty and well being of the republic.

Amongst the religious leaders, the Rockefeller donation set off a war of debate on religion's role in the society. Seeking to protect their followers, religious leaders spoke out against the Standard Oil Trust and aligned it as a force against God. Dr. Washington Gladden's powerful and vitriolic commentary spread through countless religious publications denouncing the power of "mammon" over the minds and hearts of people. The influence of money raised



many questions towards these outspoken church leaders. Others reaffirmed religion's aloofness from the questions of public debate.

The visions of Congress and President Theodore Roosevelt affirmed the growing belief that the private sector should no longer stand apart and isolated from public action. The state should regulate the market. President Roosevelt's impassioned statements before Congress and Congress' sponsorship of federal investigations into the Standard Oil Company's business methods affirmed the beginning of a new age and the development of a new active government.

The Standard oilmen believed in their right to utilize whatever means necessary in order to secure business and success. The presence of correspondence revealing surprise and discomfort at the public reaction represented the conflict present between the private and public sector. The Sherman Antitrust Act represented the pinnacle of Congress' concern for the development of trusts, monopolies, and corporations.

The Great Merger Movement of 1899-1904 brought an end to traditional forms of business of the mid-nineteenth century. The Supreme Court of the United States in 1911 affirmed the public's opinion that certain businesses of great scale required regulation in declaring the Standard Oil Company in restraint of trade. The dissolution of the Standard Oil Company represented to the public what was at stake in the new economic patterns of the early twentieth century.

The U.S. republican tradition found strength in the public discussions of big business and especially in the language that characterized the negative qualities of the Standard Oil Company. Using its size, power, and wealth, the Standard Oil Company succeeded in pushing out many independent businessmen who sought to build a name for themselves in the petroleum industry.

Standard mercilessly undermined the freedom of independent initiative, crushing the liberty of the individual. Amidst calls of abuse and corruption, a resurgence of republican-inspired rhetoric found its way into the hearts and minds of the American people. The trust had undermined the liberty of the people. Without liberty and independence, the republic would disappear.

Standard Oil and the presence of other monopoly corporations had the opposite effect upon the ideals of traditional liberalism. The invisible hand of the market had failed to quell monopoly power, a power that undermined the survival of the competitive market. Questioning the continued reliability of the free, unregulated market necessitated the development of a new ideology, an ideology that could answer the hard questions and the perplexing changes and shifts in the U.S. economy.

Modern liberalism became the new answer. The market had failed under the pressure of monopoly powers, a fact made glaringly obvious by the Standard Oil Company's control over the petroleum industry. If the presence of large corporations was going to continue in the United States, another fact confirmed by the immense changes to the private sector, then there needed to be restraints in place. The need for market regulation became an important part of this new ideology. Providing Americans with a frame through which to view the country and the changing economic forces, the development of modern liberalism was cemented by the presence, in part, of Standard Oil and other big corporations, and by the role that public discussion would play in directing the concerns and actions of the United States government.



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