

THE POWER OF THE AMERICAN PRESS AND THE PUBLIC SOUL OF THE GILDED AGE

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Before Broadway, silent film, and talkies, celebrity status began with the American Press and their ability to publicize the lives of elite men of finance and industry. Daily newspaper articles and telegraph wires reported their activities, business affairs, leisure time, and travels. Some newspapers criticized that these tycoons were held in excessively high regard, as if they were royalty or other dignitaries.¹ However, most popular mainstream presses frequently featured photos of Gilded Age men with their families and homes, glamorizing their extravagant lifestyles and wealth.² In addition to images, the popular press also cited famous academics such as President Woodrow Wilson, who was quoted referring to finance men as celebrities.³ The most fasci-

¹ "Jay Gould Resting," *The Kansas Agitator*, August 11, 1891.

² "Lakewood's Lincoln Day: Hotels and Cottages Thronged with Holiday Visitors," *New York Times*, February 14, 1904.

³ "Dr. Woodrow Wilson Defines Material Issues; Scathing Arraignment of Political and Industrial control over "new issues of securities, its occupation of places on corporate boards of directors, and its Conditions Which have Made Possible the Recent Panic in Financial Circles.

nating aspect of American media coverage during the turn of the twentieth century is that it bestowed celebrity status upon some of the most prominent men of the Gilded Age often only after these men died. Thus it was postmortem that robber barons turned into beloved philanthropists.

On the morning of March 31, 1913, the *New York Times* announced the death of Wall Street financier, J.P. Morgan. He died at 12:05 p.m. in Rome with his daughter Louisa near his bedside. Prior to Morgan's death, the press covered a senate committee hearing that investigated his one hundred thousand dollar contribution to Theodore Roosevelt's presidential campaign and his involvement in the "money trust" violation on Wall Street. In 1911, prominent civic leader and lawyer, Samuel Untermyer drew national attention to Wall Street and proclaimed that wealthy business men, including Morgan, made an agreement that maintained control over manufacturing corporations and the New York Stock Exchange. The accusation led to the 1912 investigation of J.P. Morgan, by Untermyer and the Pujo Committee (The Banking and Currency of the U.S. House of Representatives), which questioned his business practices and character. The mainstream and labor press reported court proceedings daily, creating a tarnished image of the financier who had been previously glorified after the Panic of 1907 as a national savior.

Despite Morgan's favorable testimony in Washington D.C. during the investigation, the press continued to harass him after the hearing. The *New York Times* suggested that, "It is necessary to question the good faith or fair dealing of the bankers in their relations with these controlled corporations in order to realize the impropriety of permitting this condition to continue unchecked without

Radical Reform in Our National Politics Suggested Through the Appointment of a Common Council Selected from College Men." *New York Times*, November 24, 1907.

supervision.”⁴ Heading the recommendation from his top advisors, Morgan left the United States for Egypt immediately following his testimony to “rest and regain his health.”⁵ The Chicago *Day Book* hounded Morgan while he traveled abroad and posted five separate telegrams about him on February 17, 1913. These short wires reviewed his ailing health and trip, “Rome: J.P. Morgan said to be seriously ill, left Cairo, Egypt, today attended by two specialists and two trained nurses.” Another wire from London reported, “...that J.P. Morgan is seriously ill and being hastened to Naples, where Paris physicians will attend him, was alleged by Morgan’s associates to be a stock market trick.”⁶ His unethical business practices, as well as his status and wealth, gave journalists and the popular press a public forum in which to discuss his waning health and extravagant lifestyle, even on his deathbed.

Morgan’s death captured international attention from the press, world leaders, and ordinary people. *Le Figaro*, an Italian newspaper, announced his death with the headline, “No other American citizen would have received such marks of respect from Europe and no other would have merited this homage.”⁷ Published reports included detailed information on Morgan’s funeral arrangements and the many condolences sent by elite families from around the world. His associations among the upper class evoked emotions of great loss and allowed newspapers to sell a personal image of wealth that working class Americans

⁴ “Analysis of Money Trust.” *New York Times*, March 1, 1913. p. 1. Accessed online through ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (1851 – 2006) in Kelly J. Peeler, *The Rise and Fall of J.Pierpont Morgan: The Shift in John Pierpont Morgan’s Public Image From the Bailout of the Moore & Schley Brokerage House in 1907 to the Pujo Hearings in 1913* (Working Paper, 2010).

⁵ Jean Strouse, *Morgan: American Financier* (New York: Random House, 1999), 681.

⁶ “Outside News from Wire and Cable,” *Day Book*, February 17, 1913.

⁷ Strouse, *Morgan*, 681.

would not otherwise experience. According to the *New York Times*, “In Mr. Morgan, America had a public soul. Though he died in a foreign land he died at home, for the whole world was his home.”⁸

The popular press used Morgan’s celebrity status to alter his image and created a sense of American ownership over the deceased icon whom they had criticized for months prior to his death. The wealth and power that he wielded during his life intrigued the public as he was exalted as a hero of economic progress and was vilified by the left as an icon of capitalist greed.⁹ The press conveniently created a discourse that transformed Morgan into an iconic image, negative or revered, at the public’s expense. Elite men of industry gained an air of celebrity status through both mainstream and leftist press who published their wealth and business actions, while altering their images for financial gain.

Historians such as Charles L. Ponce de Leon and Robert F. Dalzell have examined twentieth century discourse of the American press, concentrating primarily on the language the press chose to use when reporting on upper-class men. Ponce de Leon examines the late nineteenth century elite bourgeoisie and how early press reports portrayed them as “Robber Barons,” a derogatory term that highlighted the unscrupulous methods by which these powerful men obtained their wealth. He discusses the transformation of these men’s public image when coverage shifted from hostile to positive. The popular press began highlighting progressive ideals of these self-made men and movements towards nature, fishing, and hunting because these traits and activities signified the simple life; the epitome of

⁸ “Morgan’s Body Here Wrapped in Flag.” *New York Times*, April 12, 1913.

⁹ Strouse, *Morgan*, introduction.

“moderation” and “common sense.”¹⁰ The press abandoned the negative discourse of the parasite image they previously fostered and instead produced a more positive outlook on the wealthy in order to promote newspaper sales. Robert F. Dalzell, Jr., explored the paradox of excessive wealth and philanthropic activities as “the passion for equality paired with widespread wealth and a love of money,” and describes it as a solution for the elite during the early twentieth century. The narrative discussed the philanthropy of John D. Rockefeller and the public’s mixed feelings regarding his charitable contributions. Industrious (good rich) wealthy men had to accomplish good deeds of charity with conviction, whereas the robber baron (bad rich) used philanthropy more as a tool to gain popularity than for the general well being of society. Dalzell and Ponce de Leon emphasize the influence that the press held over this new social class and their public image. The media transformed these wealthy men into American celebrities because their “contributions to society outweighed the soul crushing business of profit seeking.”¹¹ The detailed accounts and daily articles of the early twentieth century from both the popular and leftist press created a distinct status among national figures of the upper-class, which helps historians examine the influence print held in creating celebrity status through the use of the constantly changing discourse.

During the Gilded Age, the American press developed the image of celebrity by publishing articles describing the estates, families, and business affairs of these wealthy men of finance and industry that average Americans could only have imagined. However, early newspaper

¹⁰ Charles L. Ponce de Leon, *Self-Exposure: Human-Interest Journalism and the Emergence of Celebrity in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), Ch. 5 “From Parasites to Public Servants: The Rehabilitation of the Rich,” 141-171.

¹¹ Robert F. Dalzell, Jr., *The Good Rich: And What They Cost Us* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 3-9, 71-92.

accounts negatively affected these men, pitting them against the less fortunate working class. The popular press' reports described Jay Gould, Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, and J.P. Morgan as robber barons and monopolists who exploited the poor and abused financial markets, thus dubbing them, "selfish, greedy, cold, cruel, and criminal."¹² American publishers transformed how the nation viewed the new "idle rich" by emphasizing a distinction between producers and parasites in society. Later in the century, a tide of radicalism spurred wealthy editors to generate more favorable images towards the gilded elite. These men gradually became the epitome of "true success," which included being organizers, builders, and industrial statesman. Early twentieth century aristocratic men were not necessarily labeled bad because they were rich but instead due to their transgressions against society.¹³ The influence of the mainstream press altered the discourse and can be seen in each man's obituary. In these obituaries, the dissenting language that had been used early in their careers has been replaced with a discourse of true moral success. Prior to their deaths, newspapers found that writing in a sensationalist tone was advantageous to profits and helps explain why, in addition to concerns over society's well-being, these papers examined gilded men through a hostile lens.

Criticism of the rich increased during the 1880s after Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* newspaper sales soared by adopting a more populist tone. He vilified the rich, denounced wealthy businessmen and his "publishers... were compelled to take a more jaundiced view of the rich, exposing the often unscrupulous methods by which they gained their fortunes..." They frequently leaked scandalous stories about elite businessmen revealing unvirtuous behav-

¹² Ibid, 6.

¹³ Ponce de Leon, *Self-Exposure*, 144-153.

ior in both their public and private lives. J.P. Morgan, Jay Gould, John D. Rockefeller, and Andrew Carnegie found themselves constantly attacked by reformers and radicals. Working class Americans were "...committed to arresting corporate power and bridging divisions of class and ethnicity that appeared to threaten the integrity of the republic."¹⁴ This new kind of elite seemed to threaten small entrepreneurs, farmers, and laborers who despised monopolies. The mainstream press joined this rhetoric, labeling elite men as, "...parasites whose values were antithetical to those of the progressive nation."¹⁵

By the turn of the twentieth century, editors began to scale back their public hostility toward the wealthy. The national magazine *Collier's* in 1906 declared Rockefeller as "one of America's best millionaires" despite having built his trust by "crushing out small producers." He was nonetheless a "builder" who had advanced American interests in the global struggle for economic supremacy. The press succeeded in constructing an image of the rich that featured their contributions as "industrial statesmen" and promoters of progress rather than solely popularizing their financial worth. Powerful men were no longer viewed as "bad rich" because they were wealthy, but could be identified as the "good rich" who were visionaries who organized, were inventive, and "eliminators of waste."¹⁶ Publications similar to *Collier's* left the critiquing of wealthy men to muckrakers and socialists, while the mainstream press began to de-

¹⁴ Ibid. 149, 143, 144.

¹⁵ Richard L. McCormick, "The Discovery That Business Corrupts Politics: A Reappraisal of the Origins of Progressivism," *American Historical Review* 86 (April 1981): 247-74 in Charles L. Ponce de Leon, *Self-Exposure: Human-Interest Journalism and the Emergence of Celebrity in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 144.

¹⁶ Ponce de Leon, "Parasites to Public Servants," 151-153.

fend the image of elite businessmen through the creation of progressive philanthropy.¹⁷

According to them, the wealthy could not detract attention from their business practices through charity; a true philanthropist had to put money to good use with a deep sense of fulfillment and not simply give it away.¹⁸ The two most notable progressive philanthropists, Carnegie and Rockefeller, both engaged in organizations that contributed to society on a national scale. Carnegie repeatedly donated funds for public libraries but first required city government plans to ensure proper distribution of his gift.¹⁹ Rockefeller even started a foundation in his name that successfully found a cure for hookworm, a common parasite among the poverty stricken in the southern United States. Their experts and the ability to run their foundations as efficient businesses allowed the Gilded Age men to gain the support of the press. But despite their good works they experienced a backlash from socialist and labor press journals such as the *Kansas Agitator*, the *Dalles Daily Chronicle*, and the *Stark County Democrat*. These journals, having grown out of earlier populist movements, stressed that the institutions were self-perpetuating and under the control of disinterested experts, not their benefactors.²⁰

This transformation of the rich's public identity in the popular press began at the turn of the century when the deaths of Morgan, Rockefeller, and Carnegie occurred. Although these successful statesman and industrialists encountered both aspects of being labeled "good" and "bad" rich, the timing of their deaths permitted the press to de-

¹⁷ Louis Filler, *The Muckrakers* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993) in Charles L. Ponce de Leon, *Self-Exposure: Human-Interest Journalism and the Emergence of Celebrity in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 151.

¹⁸ Ponce de Leon, *Self-Exposure*, 159.

¹⁹ "Carnegie's Noble Gift," *New York Times*, February 10, 1890.

²⁰ Ponce de Leon, *Self-Exposure*, 160.

scribe their true success as the ability to avoid high society rituals, leading a lifestyle of moderation promoting good health despite their wealth. Jay Gould died at a time of public hostility towards the elite. When his death was reported, the image conveyed focused on the wealth behind the man rather than his contributions to society. Yet most journalists in the mainstream press encouraged a positive campaign, which portrayed him rather favorably. Ultimately, the mainstream and socialist press established their influence on the portrayals of the wealthy and the ability to transform public opinion of elite men at the time of their deaths by highlighting their contributions to society.²¹ The obituaries released included the press's opinion of each man's legacy and transformation, whether good or bad, and it enabled them to inflate the private and public images of these men depending on the political and social atmosphere before and after their deaths.

The *New York Times* routinely published articles that revealed John D. Rockefeller's charitable acts, however, the *Day Book*, a labor newsprint, regularly lambasted the petroleum magnate and his foundations. Thus an article by Herbert Quick on November 6, 1913 denounced the Rockefeller Foundation for its ability to gain profit through medical cures. The author argued that Rockefeller profited from his foundation's cure of the hookworm pandemic among the poor. He complained that millions of unprogressive people had been cured for less than ten cents a day while Rockefeller's riches produced a cure enabling him to procure even more wealth. Quick stated that, "Rockefeller's money will redeem from disease millions and millions-to make him and his heirs richer." He also chided the millionaire by saying, "Of all men who ever lived, the status of John D. Rockefeller is strangest and most pitiable."²²

²¹ Ibid, 141-171.

²² Herbert Quick, "John D. Rockefeller's Philanthropy Will Redeem Millions To Make Him Richer," the *Day Book*, November 6, 1913.

On the other hand, *New York Times* articles recognized Rockefeller's good will by recognizing amount of money he donated. The American Baptist Education Society described Rockefeller as a "generous friend" for his contribution of one hundred thousand dollars to promote Christian culture. The press praised the "princely" gift, which was "generously tendered," and further noted that the organization would designate the bequest according to Rockefeller's approval.²³ They also reported his spiritual endeavors at the Euclid Avenue Baptist Church in Cleveland where Rockefeller had been an active member since childhood and also rented a pew. Mr. Rockefeller on that particular day made an "eloquent and heartfelt" prayer that addressed the children during Sunday School.²⁴ Another article gave an account of his reception at the University of Chicago. Rockefeller received "genuine oration," "real gratitude," and "sincere enthusiasm" from the youth who praised him.²⁵ A year earlier Rockefeller had given three million dollars to the university to establish a school of medicine.²⁶ He also hired woodchoppers in January to cut down his own trees, and sold over three hundred cords of wood to needy families on his estate at three dollars a cord waiving his delivery fee.²⁷ Although Rockefeller received severe criticism for greed from both liberal and labor press, the mainstream press and wider media depicted him as a methodical contributor, who donated millions of dollars and only requested that his money be used in a business like manner.

²³ "John D. Rockefeller's Generosity," *New York Times*, March 3, 1889.

²⁴ "Sunday School Superintendent," *New York Times*, June 21, 1896.

²⁵ "They Sang 'Its Use Is Most Just.'," *New York Times*, July 5, 1896.

²⁶ "Another Million Dollar Gift," *New York Times*, December 16, 1895.

²⁷ "John D. Rockefeller Selling Wood," *New York Times*, January 25, 1903.

The *New York Times* also examined and publicized the charitable endeavors of the steel industrialist, Andrew Carnegie, entitling their news articles with the favorable words such as, “Generous offer.”²⁸ The February 10, 1890 article “Carnegie’s Noble Gift,” claimed the philanthropist donated one million dollars to the city of Pittsburg for the erection of one free central library that would serve five smaller branches in various districts of the city. They referred to this donation as a “munificent offer,” that was more than necessary.²⁹ On the other hand, a 1912 *Day Book* article scrutinized Carnegie by referring to him as “Andy,” implying familiarity in a mocking way, and berated him for creating a fund of twenty-seven thousand dollars for the former presidents of the United States. This same article showcased Carnegie’s anti-union sentiments and the suffering he created for working class families. The leftist press associated words such as “tenement squalor” and “wretchedness,” “crowded workrooms,” “women were drawn and haggard,” “children cowed and cowering,” and stated that canneries provided “filth around food,” and wool mills were “barren cities of a trust lust.” The author confirmed the violence of anti-union attitudes when he described, “the martialled ring of bayonets of the soldiers of the masters” and concluded with the moral breakdown of the poor workers and blamed Carnegie for the “redlight places,” the “misery and horror,” “drunken women,” and “men who have lost their manhood.”³⁰ The Andrew Carnegie depicted in this article was the antithesis of the great philanthropist previously described in other pieces, such as the *New York Times*, which chose to showcase Carnegie’s donations that funded public libraries, vocational education, and the arts. The working class press, however, criticized this image and

²⁸ “Mr Carnegie’s Generous Offer,” *New York Times*, February 7, 1890.

²⁹ “Carnegie’s Noble Gift,” *New York Times*, February 10, 1890.

³⁰ “Andy Carnegie’s Fund,” the *Day Book*, November 23, 1912.

introduced discrepancies between Carnegie's gifts and his corporations.

Another mogul and financier, J.P. Morgan, was also regularly reviewed in published articles from both the left-ist and mainstream press who questioned his power and business practices before his untimely death. The *Tacoma Times* released an article written by C.M. Keys, a financial editor of *World's Week*, who examined Morgan during his testimony in front of the Pujo Committee in December of 1912. The Pujo "money trust" investigation enabled the press to discredit Morgan and his banking firm before his death by stating that the real question that the public wanted answered by the committee was, "Is not J.P. Morgan & Co. the actual money Trust of the land-a soulless, self-perpetuating corporation engaged in monopolizing the money and the credit of the whole great United States!" Keys concluded by condemning Morgan's actions and feigned lack of knowledge about his firm's past activities by portraying his power as a dominating force that seemed to last forever.³¹ Unlike Carnegie and Rockefeller, the press' inclusion of Morgan's charitable acts was hardly mentioned. They occasionally announced his purchases of rare artwork that he lent to the Metropolitan Museum of Art such as when the *New York Times* referred to twenty-two Chinese vases he lent as, "Two notable examples by Frans Hals...have been placed on exhibition in Gallery 24."³² In contrast, the press distinctly mentioned Morgan's great charity after he died, but it focused on the personal satisfaction he gained in acquiring great works of art and his ability to rescue the nation during its time of crisis.

Unlike the others, Jay Gould rarely received favorable coverage from mainstream press editors. Gould re-

³¹ C.M. Keys, "Certainly, There is a Money Trust! Doesn't J. Pierp. Say So?," the *Tacoma Times*, 31 December 1912.

³² "Art Museum Receives More Fine Paintings," *New York Times*, 5 February 1907.

mained a repudiated industrialist, who was fabulously rich and benefited from unprecedented power.³³ Viewed as a thief and dishonorable businessman, he received much scrutiny from mainstream publishers and the leftist press who bombarded him from both sides. According to most articles, he repeatedly engaged in corrupt business practices that involved land, railroads, and Wall Street. An example of Gould's notoriety appeared four months before his death in the *Kansas Agitator*, when it repudiated the popular press for declaring that he was resting. They were angry and thus insulted the mainstream press for believing that, "Jay Gould ranked with President Harris or Queen Victoria," because they thought Gould was not a great man, rejecting the idea that he needed a rest. The article boasted the inability for Gould to be weary; because "physical weariness" and "mental exertion" were barely possible for him, and claiming that, "Jay Gould's methods of squeezing out small shareholders, crushing rivals, and watering stock, are so old that Mr. Gould knows them by heart."³⁴

Jay Gould was the first mogul to die and his image was the first to undergo the transformation from bad rich to good rich in American print culture. In contrast to previous articles, Gould's obituary highlighted his personal character as a dedicated family man. The *New York Times* along with other national mainstream newspapers announced his death dramatically and with great reverence toward his life and wealth. On the morning of December 2, 1892, "Mr. Gould desired to bid his family good-by. Then he looked tenderly into the face of each one, smiled at each and all was over."³⁵ The image that these articles presented in their first paragraphs indicated a deep sense of loss felt by the family towards his impending death. Gould had been struggling

³³ Charles L. Ponce de Leon, "Parasites to Public Servants," 143.

³⁴ "Jay Gould Resting," *Kansas Agitator*, August 11, 1891.

³⁵ "Jay Gould Obituary," *Daily Citizen [Iowa City, IA]*, December 3, 1892.

with pulmonary consumption for three years so when the end came, the family had been prepared; "His children were at his bedside and they recognized that the hopes of the past few days were vanishing and that the end was not far off."³⁶ The image of Gould described by the authors acknowledged him as a man who deeply loved his family and created a scene of sympathy for the public to absorb, but his wealth still attracted the most attention. Gould's known holdings and monetary value as speculated by the *New York Times* included real estate, railroads, stock control, government bonds, and the cash he kept on hand (two to five million dollars), and they estimated his estate totaled a worth of over one hundred million dollars.³⁷ In contrast, the *Daily Citizen* did not guess at Gould's worth at the time of his death, but stated, "When Jay Gould balanced his books the first of the year the figures showed that he was the richest man in the world." They also reported that Gould had replaced both John D. Rockefeller and William Waldorf Astor at the top of the list simply because he made more money than they did. The press included that the previous year Gould had been rated as the third richest man with an income of one hundred twenty-five million dollars. The magnitude of doubling a fortune of one hundred twenty-five million dollars in one year has the elements of a tale of the "Arabian Nights," according to the *Daily Citizen*.³⁸ The popular press was able to create a favorable image while ignoring prior discrepancies they had published during Gould's life. The once reviled man of industry became a successful family man credited for his accumulation of wealth.

While mainstream newspapers created a beloved image of Gould when he died, they instead fashioned an international celebrity out of J.P. Morgan, and on the morn-

³⁶ "He is Dead," *Daily Citizen* [Iowa City, Iowa], December 3, 1892.

³⁷ "Jay Gould's Career Ended."

³⁸ "He is Dead," *Daily Citizen* [Iowa City, Iowa], December 3, 1892.

ing of April 1, 1913 flags were lowered to half-mast and immediate attention was placed toward the stock market with the *New York Times* headline, "Stocks Unaffected By Morgan's Death."³⁹ The initial report described Wall Street's reaction to Morgan's death, yet when his body arrived stateside from Italy eleven days later, the popular press detailed every account of the grieving family's activities. The article, "Morgan's Body Here Wrapped In A Flag," outlines his family's personal moments and the care they showed his dead body. Upon arrival to the United States, Morgan's body was detained offshore and placed under quarantine. The press illustrated the stateroom that housed his body; "four slender tall electroliers made of solid silver burned day and night, two placed at either ends of Morgan's coffin, the room contained black velvet curtains and black carpeting." Morgan's daughter, Mrs. Satterlee, held the key to the locked chapel and visited her father daily to pray on one of the four black velvet cushions present for the family to kneel on beside him. The publication recounted a vivid image about the removal of Morgan's coffin "it passed between a double file of the ships company standing at attention with bared heads in the passageway, to a stairway, and thence to a lower deck and over a gang-plank rarely used to the waiting hearse."⁴⁰ The print media's elaborate narrative expressed the exclusive nature of Morgan's funeral procession and the care his dead body commanded which was fit for a national statesman, not a robber baron.

The press evaluated both Gould and Morgan in terms of family and celebrity status, but when Andrew Carnegie died they recounted his passing plainly and as a man of leisure. Carnegie outlived the other men and died at his

³⁹ "Stocks Unaffected By Morgan's Death," *New York Times*, April 1, 1913.

⁴⁰ "Morgan's Body Wrapped in a Flag," *New York Times*, April 12, 1913.

estate in August of 1919 at eighty-four years old. Fortunately for Carnegie, he lived long enough for the press to mourn his life and alter his image, with the *New York Times* entitling the front page in both with “Andrew Carnegie Dies of Pneumonia in His 84th Year.” When he passed, they described an old man far removed from New York high society and the steel industry. The press announcement of Carnegie’s demise highlighted his estate value simply, unlike Jay Gould. The *New York Times* briefly mentioned his wealth with the headline, “Estate Estimate at \$500,000,000, While His Benefactions Totaled \$350,695,650.” Carnegie’s good works later in life involved living plainly, fishing, gardening, and continuing to donate money to his church and libraries. According to the article Carnegie, “...had not lost his interest in libraries. Recently he contributed to the Lenox Library a sum for installing handsome new fixtures in the building.”⁴¹ Unlike Morgan’s death, the press did not detail Carnegie’s funeral arrangements or describe the room his body laid in, but instead gave a brief account of the services the family arranged and his church, Lenox Congregation, rather than New York City. Unlike the deaths of Gould and Morgan, Carnegie’s later life was evaluated as a dear friend that had a fulfilling life, while still maintaining his status as an American celebrity icon.

In similar fashion to Andrew Carnegie, the press glorified the life of John D. Rockefeller at the time of his death by acknowledging his long lifespan and cherished goal; “John D. Rockefeller Sr., wanted to live until July 9, 1939, when he would have rounded out a century of life.” The press evaluated Rockefeller’s contributions and described the changes that he witnessed before he died. The papers also referenced his noble contributions to society

⁴¹ “Andrew Carnegie Dies of Pneumonia in His 84TH Year,” *New York Times*, August 12, 1919.

such as, “the passing of the great industrialist, who will be remembered both as philanthropist and as America’s first billionaire, spread across the country and to Europe, leaders in educational, religious and charitable organizations paid tribute to his memory.” Like Morgan, Rockefeller’s death also witnessed flags at half-mast on public buildings, the press disregarded Rockefeller’s monetary value, minimizing his wealth as, “relatively small and very liquid” and it “would amount to \$25,000,000.”⁴² Strikingly, unlike the other moguls, Rockefeller died alone in his Florida estate amongst his servants because his wife Laura had died twenty years earlier. They also described his later years of retirement and leisure stating he enjoyed his garden, took automobile rides, golfed, and attended church, very much mimicking the reports that followed Carnegie’s death. The *New York Times* also evaluated Rockefeller’s life through his simple pleasures and his Christianity because he was no longer the industrialist that deserved condemnation, but instead a national treasure due to his charitable contributions to society.

Although, the mainstream press immortalized these men when they died, they continued to evaluate their business practices and contributions to society, denouncing Morgan and Gould’s business affairs even after their deaths. On the other hand, Carnegie’s and Rockefeller’s legacies remained intact, possibly due to longer life spans in which they had more time to create a favorable image. Prior to J.P. Morgan’s death, the *Day Book* attacked his character and corporate actions and then proceeded to dissect Morgan postmortem through court proceedings involving his former company. According to the article “Morgan Books to be Scanned by Commerce Body,” the personal accounts of the late J.P. Morgan were to be thoroughly ex-

⁴² Paul Crowell, “John D. Rockefeller Dies at 97 in His Florida Home; Funeral to be Held Here,” *New York Times*, May 24, 1937.

amined by the interstate commerce commission. However, they further implicated that the “Solicitor Folk denied that the inquiry had been ‘halted’ by order of President Wilson,” suggesting government conspiracy and bringing more attention to the investigation betraying Morgan’s image even further.⁴³ The article, “Mellen Makes Morgan Stand Out Plain Deal,” had the Ex-President Mellen of the New Haven Railroad declare that, “J.P. Morgan was the dominating factor in the affairs of the New Haven and that contracts covering enormous sums of money were placed at the instigation of Morgan with firms he recommended.”⁴⁴ The leftist press did not let up on Morgan or his financials, and continued to vilify his celebrity status. An author who published an article in *Goodwins Weekly*, defended Morgan and blasted the leftist press. “The Hatred of the Rich,” explained the reasons ordinary American’s hated the wealthy, but commended Morgan and his dishonest methods because, “...in finding warrant for his great accumulation, he has given to the nation and to the world things that make both nation and the world better and happier because of him.” Denouncing the leftist press, the *Day Book* called them “foolish enemies of the rich” for painting him as a monster and also praised Morgan, referring to him as one of America’s greatest men because he was gifted in an unusual way on matters of finance. This article reaffirmed Morgan as the savior of the country during the Panic of 1907 when, “He rendered a mighty service to his nation and to his race.”⁴⁵ The press continued to debate Morgan and his legacy after his death, but many articles immortal-

⁴³ “Morgan Books to be Scanned by Commerce Body,” the *Day Book*, May 26, 1914.

⁴⁴ “Mellen Makes Morgan Stand Out Plain Deal,” the *Day Book*, May 20, 1914.

⁴⁵ “Hatred of the Rich,” *Goodwins Weekly* [Salt Lake City, Utah], April 5, 1913.

ized Morgan and his great wealth, regardless of opposing views.

With Jay Gould's death the leftist press returned with more fervor, condemning him even though the mainstream press praised him as a family man. The *Stark County Democrat* waited twelve days after Gould's death to curse him and along with the mainstream press for presenting him as a poor boy who worked hard to accumulate his wealth. The article aptly named, "Defending Jay Gould," proclaimed, "The bold, naked, indisputable truth is that Jay Gould's success in extorting such vast wealth from the public, is the highest possible proof that the masses of producers-toilers-are defrauded."⁴⁶ A second article stated, "...as many cents as he owned millions, and dying he had come to the same end as millions of others-a little piece of earth to sleep in..."⁴⁷ The *Kansas Agitator* also joined in the rhetoric after Gould's death insisting that, "he was cordially hated by the great mass of working people of America." The article continued to proclaim Gould as "selfish," "unscrupulous," "heartless and soulless," and "without conscience."⁴⁸ The hatred and fascination with Jay Gould continued for four years after his death, and in 1896, the press proclaimed that Gould had been a bigamist. Sarah Ann Angell told the *Salt Lake City Herald* she was Gould's first wife and that they had a daughter together before he abandoned her in 1852.⁴⁹ Although, the publication acknowledges discrepancies in Mrs. Angell's story, especially since she was the fourth widow to claim this, the press still found it worthy of public attention, indicating that they were not fond of Gould or his past practices.

⁴⁶ "Defending Jay Gould," the *Stark County Democrat* [Canton, OH], December 25, 1892.

⁴⁷ "Jay Gould's Fame," the *Stark County Democrat*.

⁴⁸ "Jay Gould," *Kansas Agitator*, December 15, 1892.

⁴⁹ "The Gould's Family Skeleton," the *Salt Lake Herald* [Salt Lake City, Utah], July 5, 1896.

Unlike Gould, the leftist publications had less to say about Andrew Carnegie after his death, and countless world publications praised him and his philanthropy. An announcement by the *New York Tribune*, asserted in their headline that Carnegie, “Spent his final years spreading education through libraries; heroism was rewarded,” and also noted that when he died, “Carnegie was greatly interested in all movements that would do away with war.”⁵⁰ The *Perrysburg Journal* claimed that Carnegie believed firmly that it was sinful to die rich, and that “through countless gifts he tried to live up to his own conviction.” After Carnegie’s death the press continued to release articles that solidified his identity as the world’s greatest philanthropist.⁵¹

The popular press also published articles reaffirming John D. Rockefeller’s celebrity image, publishing only a few articles about Rockefeller after his retirement from Standard Oil. He had dedicated the rest of his life to corporate philanthropy and medical research, so when he passed the leftist press no longer viewed him as a threat to the working class and democracy. The popular press established Rockefeller’s legacy after the turn of the twentieth century when they transformed their critique of the rich and began to distinguish the wealthy that deserved condemnation from those who were wholesome and useful.⁵² The press succeeded in transforming the once notorious robber baron image of Rockefeller into a celebrated man of simplicity that gave back to society.

The newspaper publications appearing after the deaths of these Gilded Age men represent press ideals of the twentieth century. Amidst public scrutiny from print

⁵⁰ “Carnegie Rose from Penniless Boy to One of the Richest Men in the World,” *New York Tribune*, August 12, 1919. “World News,” the *Citizen* [Berea, KY] August 14, 1919.

⁵¹ “Andrew Carnegie-Steel King Taken by Death,” *Perrysburg Journal* [Ohio], August 14, 1919.

⁵² Ponce de Leon, *Self-Exposure*, 165.

media each man was over-exposed to the average reader, and the examination of the upper class elite and wealth helped to create an image of valor or disdain. However, when the press began to publish the contributions robber barons made to society, they transformed them into philanthropists. The two men who did not find complete public redemption and did not live long enough to experience the ultimate gain of the popular press. J.P. Morgan and Jay Gould experienced public infamy because they died too soon to have the opportunity to realize the importance of contributing to society. Morgan's legacy became un-marred after time passed, and his greatest legacy was identified as his financial feats on Wall Street. John D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie lived past the turmoil of the industrial era and the press identified them as truly successful men, and their philanthropy allowed them to be described with ease and simplicity.⁵³ The popular press recognized only charitable deeds when these industrialists died and forgave them their earlier discrepancies. The twentieth century press empowered the images of the great men of industry and influenced the public's perception of their lives and legacies, whereas the leftist and mainstream papers developed the celebrity model that would later be used to report the lives of screen actors, singers, and dancers through the images they produced exploiting the men of the Gilded Age.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 145.