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JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER, STANDARD OIL, AND THE RISE OF CORPORATE PUBLIC RELATIONS IN PROGRESSIVE AMERICA, 1902–1908

When the Supreme Court ordered the dissolution of Standard Oil in 1911, it marked the end of an unsuccessful campaign by the company to improve its public standing. Standard Oil's failure to mollify public opinion in the aftermath of Ida Tarbell's muckraking masterpiece, "The History of the Standard Oil Company," has resulted in a historiographical record that negatively assesses the company's response. This article reassesses the company response by placing it within the wider context of business history in the early twentieth century. It offers a detailed exploration of the public relations initiatives of Standard Oil from 1902 to 1908. Additionally, the article views the affair through the lens of standard corporate practices of the early Progressive Era, when large businesses had only begun to promote favorable public images. It argues that progressive reform inadvertently aided the rise of big business by teaching corporations the importance of promoting favorable public images. This wider context reveals that Standard Oil's public relations response, if unsuccessful, was not as aloof as others have argued. In fact, the company made a concerted effort to change public opinion about its business practices.

"The Government won a sweeping victory," declared the *Wall Street Journal* after the Supreme Court's May 1911 decision to dissolve the Standard Oil Trust.¹ Such a sentiment accurately captures contemporary and modern opinions, which regard this ruling as a crowning achievement of the Progressive Era's antimonopoly movement.² Yet while progressivism is often portrayed as hostile to corporations, perhaps the opposite is true—perhaps progressives, through antimonopoly rhetoric, inadvertently aided big business in its eventual domination of American life. In the case of Standard Oil, progressivism sparked changes in the company as it attempted to improve its public standing. The publication of Ida Tarbell's muckraking classic, "The History of the Standard Oil Company," in *McClure's Magazine* from 1902 to 1903 created a public firestorm, prompting John D. Rockefeller and his associates' turn to the infant field of public relations. Despite their efforts, historians largely ignore, marginalize, or criticize Standard Oil and Rockefeller's response to Tarbell. Words like aloof, belated, and silent pervade the historiography. Josh Boyd's opinion, that "muckraking journalism could have provided the push Standard needed to address public concerns, but it did not," effectively captures the assessment of historians.³ This essay argues that the opposite is true: muckraking in fact proved a crucial push for Standard, motivating the development of a

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PR program in hopes of improving public opinion. In a larger context, the essay also demonstrates that the business class at large adopted similar methods in response to public criticism, indicating a more complex relationship between progressivism and big business.

Conventional analysis dictates that Rockefeller remained publicly detached until the family hired public relations pioneer Ivy Lee in 1914 after the Ludlow Massacre.⁴ This interpretation ignores crucial developments from 1902 to 1908. Spurred by attacks in the popular media, Standard Oil gradually built a PR apparatus from nothing, while Rockefeller broke with decades of tradition and opened himself to the public in hopes of recovering his reputation. Company officials began producing favorable press and with Rockefeller's approval, Standard hired Joseph Clarke in 1906 to handle publicity full time. This essay explores the public relations initiatives Standard Oil and Rockefeller implemented from 1902 to 1908. It argues that Standard and Rockefeller worked together in developing an active public relations policy in response to criticism. Additionally, it places these developments in the wider context of business history during the Progressive Era at large. With this larger view, Rockefeller and Standard were far from aloof when facing criticism. In fact, their actions were consistent with developments in the field of public relations in the early twentieth century.

This essay thus uses the Standard Oil case as a lens to argue for a more complex relationship between big business and progressivism. Up to this point, there have been unanswered questions in this debate. To be sure, past historians have noted that progressivism did not prevent the entrenchment of corporations. For instance, William Leuchtenburg and Nancy Cohen argue that business benefited from progressive tenets like bureaucratization.⁵ Yet public relations often does not factor into this discussion. Prominently, Richard Hofstadter discounts the role of PR in the fall of antitrust movements.⁶ Lessons learned from progressives, however, aided big business in this regard as well. Muckraking attacks against business proved a counterproductive strategy that taught corporations that public opinion was a powerful force that demanded attention.⁷ The rise of the public relations profession during this period serves as evidence that business adjusted and gradually learned to sell itself to the public.⁸ They were extremely successful: despite fluctuations in opinions, by 1940, Americans had largely abandoned the deep hostility toward big business that characterized previous eras.⁹ The Standard Oil case serves as a case study that partially explains the eventual rise of big business as one of the most dominant institutions in American life.

Two details of this essay require clarification before moving forward. First is a working definition of public relations. An effective dictionary definition to keep in mind is "the occupation of establishing or maintaining a good relationship between an organization or an important person and the general public."¹⁰ PR executive John Hill elaborates on this definition, writing that the goal of PR is "in correcting, in focusing, and in organizing public opinion," precisely what Standard aimed to do in these years.¹¹ Second is Rockefeller's relationship with Standard Oil. Officially, Rockefeller retired from Standard before Tarbell's magazine series began. He remained the president as majority shareholder, but vice president John D. Archbold assumed effective control.¹² Yet evidence shows that Rockefeller and Standard remained closely related in the public mind. Rockefeller's retirement was not publicized, and the public still viewed him as head of the company. After his retirement was known, Rockefeller's

reputation as the primary builder of Standard Oil ensured that he remained the company's public face.¹³ A 1915 letter to Ivy Lee asserted that Rockefeller and Standard were "in public opinion one and the same."¹⁴ Rockefeller was also a continuing influence at Standard. Officials often contacted him and sought his input for large decisions.¹⁵ Accordingly, this essay works on the contemporary perception that Rockefeller and Standard Oil were interchangeable. An attack on Rockefeller affected Standard Oil, and vice versa. Therefore an effective response had to include both parties. As this essay shows, Rockefeller and company officials were aware of their close association and worked together in developing a mutually beneficial PR policy.

Tarbell's work appeared at a time when the public was especially receptive to its message. Since the 1870s, big business had gradually risen to an increasingly dominant position in American life.¹⁶ Forty-two corporations created during the great merger movement from 1895 to 1904 controlled at least 70 percent of their respective industries.¹⁷ For some, the prospect of corporate domination had near-apocalyptic significance.¹⁸ Entrenchment of big business posed a threat to traditional American ideals of small-town life, which distrusted the "foreignness" of distant corporations. Economic periphery areas resented being part of the "colonial economy" ruled by Northeastern industrialists and financiers.¹⁹ The merger wave threatened American business traditions, which regarded competition as good and natural, making monopoly unnatural and sparking antimonopoly movements.²⁰

Distrust of big business naturally led to suspicions about the men in charge of those corporations. The upper class seemed detached from reality with ostentatious displays of wealth. Individualistic and Social Darwinist ideals ignored the working-class plight and excused ruthless business practices.²¹ Furthermore, the accumulation of capital led to political power, earning the Senate the sobriquet, the Millionaire's Club. Many Americans both feared and resented this virtual ruling class.²² At the turn of the century, indictments against the upper class ranged from the humorous derisions of Thorstein Veblen, whose leisure class was averse to labor and obsessed with image, to the IWW's (Industrial Workers of the World) calls for violent "direct action" against capitalists.²³ Louis Galambos finds that in 1902 negative opinions about business were twice as prevalent as positive.²⁴ In this context, Tarbell's *History* appeared. As Allan Nevins argues, Tarbell's essays were presented as a well-researched work of history, which gave the publications credibility with a public already biased against big business.²⁵ Tarbell's commendable research, coupled with incendiary lines like Standard Oil was a "huge bulk, blackened by commercial sin," ensured that the publications struck a deep nerve with the public.²⁶ Such hostility from progressive reformers demanded a reaction from Standard, influencing the company's eventual turn to public relations.

Historians have been generally unimpressed with Standard Oil and Rockefeller's response to Tarbell, if not outright hostile. Criticisms date back to the earliest biographies of Rockefeller, which portray him as unable to grasp the importance of public relations.²⁷ Some critiques leave the impression that Standard Oil was entirely out of touch with corporate practices in this period and did nothing right from Tarbell's first article to the trust's dissolution in 1911.²⁸ Authors who are not hostile to Standard's response still typically marginalize the efforts the company made to pacify the public. They downplay or gloss over Joseph Clarke's hire and instead focus on Rockefeller's employment of Ivy Lee as the moment he accepted the importance of public image.²⁹ Bias toward Lee is

evident in the work of public relations historians as well. The general trend among these works is that Standard Oil and Rockefeller's PR efforts were incomplete, and it was only after Lee's hire that Rockefeller began shedding his private image.³⁰ Even favorable assessments lack a true context of typical business practices at the turn of the century, and we are left unaware of whether Standard's policies were groundbreaking or behind the times.³¹ Ron Chernow's *Titan* is an exception, discerning that Rockefeller's critics "profited from a fleeting transitional moment when corporations had not adapted to the new media and lacked any public relations apparatus;" yet he only references a few pieces of correspondence and does not explore the documents that demonstrate the press's changing attitude.³² Overall, we are left with a historiographical record lacking in balanced assessments that are placed in the wider context of corporate practices during the Progressive Era.

The final section of this essay ties the Tarbell affair to its Progressive Era context. The diverse and contentious Progressive Era historiography receives little comment in writing on Rockefeller and Tarbell, robbing the story of the crucial background of the United States in the midst of widespread transformation at the turn of the century. Progressives have been labeled everything from radical to conservative, and some even question whether the Progressive Movement occurred at all.³³ We are left with little synthesis on what characterized progressivism. Most generally, however, the theme of transformation in American society pervades the historiography. This is important for the essay's last section, which argues that the growth of the public relations profession was a part of the larger trend of American society rebalancing in a changing world. This essay makes two arguments about progressivism: first, that progressives failed to bring big business under control; and second, that muckraking journalism inadvertently aided the rise of big business by prompting the corporate move into public relations. Criticism from progressive reformers gave public opinion a new significance, which corporations captured by promoting more favorable public images.

PUBLIC RELATIONS AND CORPORATE PRACTICES AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

Reassessment of Rockefeller and Standard Oil requires exploration of the corporate environment at the turn of the century. Important contextual details of Standard's response do not factor into past assessments, particularly the infancy of the public relations profession; contemporary business practices that valued silence and secrecy; and Standard Oil's long history of generating controversy, inuring the company's management to external criticism. Taken together, these three factors help explain why Rockefeller and his associates did not respond immediately to Tarbell and had to gradually build up to starting a public relations program.

Several authors place modern expectations on the field of public relations.³⁴ The profession was extremely new when Tarbell's Standard Oil articles began. While America's first press agent was hired in 1889, it was not until the early twentieth century that public relations became legitimized as a profession.³⁵ America's first PR firm was founded in 1900, and Ivy Lee's legendary Parker and Lee firm started work in 1904.³⁶ Even into the 1920s, Lee was still trying to convince some corporations of the necessity of PR bureaus.³⁷ In 1923, Edward Bernays published the foundational *Crystallizing Public*

Opinion and began teaching a public relations course at New York University, the first course on the subject at an American university.³⁸ Given the infancy of the field, early press agents had very little precedent for their jobs. The expectation that Standard Oil officials could identify a potential public relations problem and formulate an effective response is simply out of context.

Additionally, several authors comment on Rockefeller's characteristic silence when facing criticism, which is accurate. Rockefeller's correspondence with his affiliates confirms that silence was official company policy.³⁹ From its foundation, Standard communicated with encoded messages and refused public disclosure of its holdings.⁴⁰ It clouds reality, however, to single out Rockefeller for this habit. Secrecy was a normal business practice in the Gilded Age. Moguls considered privacy more efficient for business. Social Darwinist ideas convinced businessmen that they were specially adapted for management of the economy. Government or public interference would upset the social and economic balance.⁴¹ Accordingly, Gilded Age businessmen were traditionally careless of public opinion, adhering to William Vanderbilt's famous "public be damned" sentiment.⁴² Some were significantly slower to grasp the power of public relations. J. P. Morgan, for instance, kept his silent attitude until his death in 1913. Numerous newspaper articles from Morgan's trip to Chicago in December 1908 note that he looked shy while speaking and avoided giving a statement to the press.⁴³ In this context, Rockefeller and Standard's privacy was consistent with norms among his fellow businessmen and developments in the public relations field at large.

Also important for context is Standard Oil's long history of generating controversy. As Tarbell herself notes, Standard faced popular and legislative scrutiny "almost constantly since its organization in 1870."⁴⁴ Long before Tarbell's articles, Standard had attracted criticism and lawsuits. Standard took part in the South Improvement Company, a planned cooperation between oil refiners and railroad companies from 1871–72, which collapsed after bitter resistance from independent oil producers. The incident remained associated with Rockefeller for years, often used as evidence of his megalomaniacal quest for monopoly.⁴⁵ After lawsuits in 1879, "Rockefeller began a thirty-year career as a fugitive from justice."⁴⁶ State lawsuits throughout the 1880s and 1890s culminated in the dissolution of the original trust, Standard Oil of Ohio, in 1892, though the corporation simply took advantage of New Jersey's favorable incorporation laws and reorganized into Standard Oil of New Jersey.⁴⁷ Despite the reorganization, Standard spent time in courts right up until its 1911 dissolution.⁴⁸

Nor was Tarbell the first to attack the trust in the popular press. Standard's most vocal critic for nearly two decades before Tarbell was Henry Demarest Lloyd. Lloyd's "Story of a Great Monopoly" credits Standard's unfair collusion with railroad companies for the oil trust's success.⁴⁹ His *Wealth Against Commonwealth* attacks all corporations, but reserves special criticism for Standard Oil. He does not name anyone associated with the company, but there is little doubt about the identity of the man who "started a little refinery in Cleveland" with his brother in 1862.⁵⁰ Lloyd's work, however, received mixed reviews at best. Critics targeted the book's length and denounced Lloyd as an apocalyptic zealot. Most agreed that the book's obviously partisan tone was too biased for serious consideration.⁵¹

Clearly, by Tarbell's first Standard Oil article in November 1902, the company was accustomed to criticism. And Tarbell turned the screws slowly: the first article was

mostly a history of the early oil industry in America, with no overt hostility to Standard. It does conclude ominously, however, that the independent oil producers were threatened when “a big hand reached out from nobody knew where, to steal their conquest and throttle their future.”⁵² Even with this clear hint of where the articles were going, at the time there was no particular reason to suspect that this magazine series would lead to the breakup of the trust within a decade. It would be some time before muckraking demonstrated the power of public opinion to big business. Only when public and legal fallout became evident did Standard officials realize that they must respond.

TARBELL AND STANDARD OIL

This context demonstrates that Tarbell’s publications were simply the latest in a long line of criticism, during all of which Standard Oil had remained generally silent and endured. This does not mean, however, that the men at Standard were oblivious to Tarbell. On the contrary, they took immediate notice. Henry H. Rogers, one of the original builders of the trust, met with Tarbell even before the *McClure’s* series began, hoping “to find out what kind of history ... *McClure’s* proposed to publish.”⁵³ The first mention of the matter in Rockefeller’s correspondence was only a month after Tarbell’s first article. The letter acknowledges that Tarbell likely aims “to do harm to the company,” and that vice president Archbold is “prepared ... to make answer if it seems necessary.”⁵⁴ Despite the early notice, the men at Standard were apparently not overly troubled by Tarbell, since the issue disappears from mention for some time.⁵⁵ Rockefeller and his associates, who had spent four decades in a cutthroat business environment and “weathered thirty years of assaults in courts and statehouses,” were evidently numbed to public criticism.⁵⁶

Given this context, it is understandable why the Standard Oil men failed to immediately address Tarbell’s challenge, yet hindsight shows that her articles proved the most damaging attack Standard would ever face. Public response is what differentiated Tarbell from Standard’s past critics. There was no pre-planned length for her *McClure’s* series, and the editor was willing to let it continue as long as Tarbell had material and magazines kept selling.⁵⁷ Enthusiastic response stretched the series to nineteen installments over nearly two years. Since antagonism toward corporations had been brewing since the Civil War, assessing the exact cause and effect relationship between Tarbell’s articles and public outcry is difficult. More work is needed in tracing public opinion over this period.⁵⁸ Given that President Roosevelt was a dedicated fan of the series, it is a fair assumption that Tarbell had an impact on subsequent antitrust actions.⁵⁹ Convenient timing also lends credence to this belief. Between 1904 and 1906, Standard Oil was hit with at least twenty-one lawsuits in eleven states, along with the federal case that eventually led to the trust’s dissolution.⁶⁰

In addition to the obvious troubles facing the company, Rockefeller personally suffered from the bad publicity. Amid death threats, he began hiring bodyguards, keeping a gun next to his bed, and fencing-off his previously open country estates.⁶¹ Rockefeller’s caution was not an overreaction. The Progressive Era was far more tumultuous than its reputation often dictates. The battle between capital and labor had grown increasingly violent since the 1870s. Radicals made assassination attempts against several industrialists and financiers. Somewhat alarmingly, the American public did not overwhelmingly condemn an attempt on J. P. Morgan, Jr.’s life in 1915, due to his reputation for financing

the war in Europe. Anarchist Leon Czolgosz's assassination of President McKinley in 1901 in the name of working-class rights sent shockwaves through the upper class.⁶² Capitalist fears of radicalism had basis in reality, and Rockefeller was not delusional in fearing for his life. Rockefeller's family also suffered from the outcry, notably his son, John, Jr. Though he was a director at Standard Oil, John, Jr. lacked his father's stomach for the more ruthless aspects of business. More interested in full-time philanthropy, he was deeply disturbed by accusations that his father's money was dishonestly earned. The scrutiny led to what is often called a nervous breakdown in 1904, when John spent a year away from the company recuperating in Europe.⁶³

STANDARD OIL AND ROCKEFELLER TURN TO PUBLIC RELATIONS

Amid public outcry and the flurry of antitrust suits, Rockefeller and Standard began developing a public relations program to calm the hostile public. We can observe a gradual, yet discernible shift in company practices, divided into two eras. From 1902 to 1905, Tarbell's impact had not become seriously damaging yet—the bulk of the antitrust suits began in late 1905 and 1906. Accordingly, the company's earliest public relations efforts were on a largely random basis, mostly characterized by reproduction of favorable articles as pamphlets. The company also briefly considered an aggressive course of suing Tarbell for libel. As 1905 progressed, Standard Oil responded to more serious fallout, including legal action against the company. That year, Rockefeller and Standard began a proactive PR campaign, making public transparency official policy. The company turned around the tactics of muckrakers and began embracing the press as a tool to promote favorable public opinion. This section establishes that Rockefeller and Standard Oil were not detached from the public, took cues from attacks in the media, and actively worked to promote a more favorable public opinion.

From 1902 to 1905, Standard considered two methods of response. First, there was an aggressive course aimed at silencing critics with lawsuits. Legal counsel Starr Murphy thought that the time had "come to handle the woman [Tarbell] without gloves" and felt that the company had enough material for a libel suit against her.⁶⁴ Nothing came of these plans, as Rockefeller feared drawing attention to Tarbell's accusations. He opined that "some publication would be better than a libel suit."⁶⁵ Standard officials agreed and decided that generating good press would be more effective, leading to Standard's second option: mollifying public opinion. Prior to 1905, Standard's press response was on a largely random basis. Typically the company searched media outlets for favorable articles and testimonies. Suitable stories were reproduced as pamphlets and distributed to libraries and offices.⁶⁶ The most that came of these early efforts was an unofficial history by Gilbert Montague. In 1903 the company discreetly financed the publication and distribution of his undergraduate thesis, *The Rise and Progress of the Standard Oil Company*. Although S. C. T. Dodd of Standard's legal office read parts of the manuscript and made some suggestions, it was not critically revised and Montague was not given access to any company materials.⁶⁷ These early activities were unofficial and depended primarily on the work of outsiders, rather than the company producing its own press through an internal publicity apparatus. Nevertheless, the slow development in these years demonstrates that Standard's practices were beginning to evolve.

Around 1905, increasing lawsuits demonstrated that the crisis would not blow over and Standard had a serious problem on its hands. Accordingly, company PR practices progressed from random and unofficial to a centralized policy managed directly from its headquarters on 26 Broadway. Standard no longer considered legal action against critics and started a campaign to improve public opinion. Reproduction of favorable articles as pamphlets continued as a tactic for years.⁶⁸ Rockefeller himself recommended at least one refutation of Tarbell for reproduction.⁶⁹ The company also introduced more direct methods. Publications started appearing that were produced or heavily edited by company members personally, beginning a new era of public relations actions. The first significant publication was “The Oil Situation in Kansas” on June 17, 1905, in *The Outlook*, a direct response to a critical article by F. S. Barde. The statement that “the public needs correct information” displays a major shift in company practices.⁷⁰ It shows Standard’s newfound attitude that if the public were properly informed, the company’s image would improve—a significant change in approach after thirty years of official secrecy.

The article marked a departure in two ways. First, it was written with the express aim of refuting an attack on the company. Key passages obviously address Barde’s claims. Barde accused Standard Oil of “seeking to control the products of the Kansas oil field by strangling competition.”⁷¹ Standard responded that this sort of control benefited society by lowering prices, and “if reducing to the minimum the cost of handling, manufacturing and marketing a prime commodity means ‘strangling competition,’ ... the public is the gainer.”⁷² Second, Standard officials took an active role in writing and publication. Starr Murphy and Rockefeller’s advisor Frederick Gates oversaw the article’s composition and personally edited it. Gates, seeing the potential of company-generated press in combating criticism, began petitioning Rockefeller for a “literary bureau with trained and experienced newspaper talent” that could analyze and respond to the press on a full-time basis.⁷³ The traditionally private Rockefeller approved the idea and gave Gates his blessing to “have a little talk with” Archbold, a significant step in the development of Standard Oil’s public relations program.⁷⁴

There are various interpretations of what sparked Rockefeller’s change of heart. Most historians agree that the “tainted money” scandal in March 1905, when several ministers argued that a \$100,000 gift from Rockefeller should not be accepted, was significant. The affair generated some of the highest press coverage Rockefeller ever received for a single event.⁷⁵ The crisis blew over, but Rockefeller was shaken and his associates began seriously questioning his policy of silence.⁷⁶ More Tarbell articles may also have influenced Rockefeller. Her 1905 publications, “John D. Rockefeller: A Character Study,” were little more than a smear campaign. Displaying none of the skillful research from her *History*, the two articles superficially insulted Rockefeller, concluding that he “is a victim of perhaps the ugliest, the least reasonable of all passions, that for money.”⁷⁷ Steve Weinberg explains Rockefeller’s change as a response to this personal attack, yet the preceding exchange between Rockefeller and Gates occurred a month before the series appeared.⁷⁸ Nevins and Chernow most likely come closest to the truth by arguing that Gates’s prodding convinced Rockefeller of the importance of public opinion.⁷⁹

Regardless of the cause of this change, Rockefeller and Standard Oil’s gradual acceptance of public relations led to the hire of former newspaper editor Joseph Clarke to

Standard's legal office in May 1906.⁸⁰ Clarke had arrived in New York City as a 22-year-old exiled Irish national in 1868. With newspaper experience dating back three decades, including positions at the *New York Herald, Journal*, and *Criterion*, he was an ideal candidate for a job that required familiarity with the press. He collected a starting salary of \$5,000 eventually raised to \$6,000, a considerable amount, especially for an Irish immigrant, in a world where the average industrial worker earned less than \$600 annually.⁸¹ Clarke had a substantial task in front of him when he arrived at 26 Broadway. Facing an overwhelmingly hostile public and judicial action against the company, he set about devising a method of improving Standard's public standing. He recommended a two-pronged approach to public relations: first, directly answer printed attacks against the company; and second, produce an officially licensed history of Standard Oil. With Clarke's strategy, Standard gradually began "to emerge from the sub-cellar into the open."⁸²

In answering attacks, Clarke wrote that "when a paper made an attack on Standard Oil, I hunted up the facts, stated them briefly, had the local Standard agent call on the editor and demand that he should print it."⁸³ This strategy added to Standard's traditional response. In addition to circulating good publicity, the company now refuted attacks as well, resulting in a more even-handed approach to public relations. By Clarke's measure, "it worked wonderfully,"⁸⁴ although his scattered correspondence and brief comments in his memoir make establishing his exact actions difficult. On one occasion, Clarke got wind of the *Herald's* plans to run an article the following Sunday asserting that Rockefeller had ruined one Edgar Brown by unfairly taking over his business. Clarke consulted with Standard Oil officials and confirmed that Rockefeller had never done business with Brown. Interestingly, the *Herald* did not produce such an article for the rest of that month. No evidence indicates that Standard suppressed the article, although officials offered Rockefeller the option.⁸⁵ In line with Clarke's plans, Standard Oil men began publicly challenging press attacks. High-ranking officials penned letters to newspapers when they printed unflattering or inaccurate statements. Most often, they argued that stories were false and based on reports from imposters claiming association with the company.⁸⁶ In one case, a source contacted the New York News Bureau claiming to have interviewed John Archbold. When the Bureau publicized these supposed remarks, Clarke went public with an official statement from Archbold that the interview was entirely fabricated.⁸⁷ Given Clarke's elusive character, more work is required in pinning down when he was directly involved with press releases and the specific stories he responded to, but it is certain that he was aware when bad press appeared and had a contingency plan in place.

The second part of Clarke's PR initiative, an official Standard Oil history, led to a failure that was largely beyond the company's control. The official history project started in 1907. Standard contracted the "profound scholar" Leonard Woolsey Bacon to write the history.⁸⁸ Unlike Gilbert Montague, Bacon was given full access to the company's records.⁸⁹ Also unlike with Montague's earlier book, Standard officials were actively involved in the writing and editing process, critically reading the manuscript and suggesting revisions.⁹⁰ Bacon completed several chapters, and the men at Standard were apparently pleased with the results. Unfortunately, the elderly Bacon died in May 1907, with the manuscript only partially complete.⁹¹ The company put out a pamphlet of Bacon's chapter on the South Improvement Company and hired a new writer for the

project. Clarke, however, was dissatisfied with the results, and Bacon's death effectively derailed the project.⁹²

Despite the failure to produce an official history, by 1907 Standard Oil was actively working toward increased public transparency. There were several aspects to this, but all were consistent with movements in the public relations field at large, which contested the rhetoric of popular outcry. A common charge was that America was dominated by soulless, faceless corporations, an image publicity men sought to break down. Roland Marchand comments that an effective and popular method was a public statement from a company official, which Standard picked up on.⁹³ In December 1907, John Archbold published an article renouncing the company's policy of silence. He challenged accusations against Standard, with headings like "Profits Due to Legitimate Enterprise, Not Illegal Rebates" and asserting that the company "seeks neither rule nor ruin." The article also includes a large image of Archbold, providing a public face for the company.⁹⁴ Clarke did his part in giving the company a face as well. He invited reporters into the company headquarters for meetings, greeting them "with a quip and a cigar."⁹⁵ This treatment came as a welcome change for reporters "who had once found the door shut in their faces."⁹⁶

In hiring Clarke, Standard Oil had taken a crucial step in the development of a public relations policy. While some historians have argued that Standard neglected its public relations, causing a frustrated Clarke to quit in 1913, they fail to provide evidence for this story.⁹⁷ The only known evidence, Clarke's memoir, does not indicate frustration. He blames his departure on the trust's dissolution, writing that "there was no great Standard Oil Company to make publicity for, but a score or two of companies needing another kind of man."⁹⁸ Tracking Clarke's success closely is difficult due to a lack of documents, and further research into public opinion changes would help establish the impact Clarke's work had in winning back the public. Undoubtedly he benefited from a general decline in muckraking after 1906, a development independent of any of his public relations efforts.⁹⁹ Under his guidance, however, the company's responses were no longer random and reliant on outsiders. The increased flow of literature and statements directly from 26 Broadway were part of a concerted campaign to improve the company's public standing. Standard Oil, while not the first corporation to embrace the field of public relations, still stands as one of the earliest examples of a company renouncing secretive Gilded Age business practices.¹⁰⁰ In response to progressive reform and attacks from muckrakers, the company strove to inform the public and shed its "soulless" image.

But what of Rockefeller's personal reputation? Although Rockefeller no longer formally controlled the company, the public still viewed him as Standard Oil's leader. Therefore, a full public relations effort required the man and the company to work together, and Rockefeller's work to improve his own reputation benefited Standard as well. Despite John Flynn's claim that Ivy Lee was the first man responsible for "selling Mr. Rockefeller to the American people," evidence shows that this was done years before Lee.¹⁰¹ Many of Joseph Clarke's efforts aimed at humanizing him in addition to the company. Rockefeller had already shown willingness to shed his characteristic silence in approving Clarke's hire. Later that summer, Rockefeller released a statement that "his long silence is to be broken and that he will do all he can to keep in personal touch with the public through the medium of the newspapers." The *Herald* responded

with a cartoon of the classic Standard Oil octopus reaching its tentacles down from a tree labeled “aloofness” shaking reporters’ hands.¹⁰² Despite the obvious derision, Rockefeller’s message had clearly gotten across: he, along with Standard Oil, sought greater transparency with the public. Afterward Rockefeller indeed opened himself much more to the press. Clarke aided this goal. Several times he requested official photos of Rockefeller for distribution among newspapers and magazines, fostering a more human image of the man and the company.¹⁰³ Perhaps most importantly, Clarke arranged for reporters to meet with Rockefeller himself, often over rounds of golf at Rockefeller’s Pocantico Hills estate, allowing the press a rare look into his personal life.¹⁰⁴

These new tactics had a measurable impact. Periodical articles before 1906–7 never praised Rockefeller for being warm or open. Although articles frequently admired his philanthropy and wealth, they more often commented on his secrecy and refusal to meet with the press.¹⁰⁵ These golf outings and meetings produced much-needed good publicity. Rockefeller’s reportedly pleasant demeanor consistently charmed visiting reporters. His personality turned vocal critic William Hoster into an ardent supporter who eagerly published Rockefeller’s statements in the *New York American*.¹⁰⁶ Hoster was only one of many reporters captivated by Rockefeller. By 1907, a new kind of article that focused on Rockefeller personally became more common. Several bore the title “The Human Side of John D. Rockefeller,” clear evidence that the topic received little attention in the past.¹⁰⁷ Social and lifestyle magazines began doing multipage or entire volume spreads on the Rockefeller estate, offering the public a seemingly intimate view of the Rockefellers.¹⁰⁸ In stating, “I think that public sentiment is distinctly more favorable to you personally,” Frederick Gates acknowledged that amid so much hostile press, Rockefeller’s efforts were welcome and effective.¹⁰⁹

Arguably the culmination of Rockefeller’s newfound proficiency with the press was the closest thing to a memoir he ever produced, *Random Reminiscences of Men and Events*. In early 1908, Standard Oil officials and publisher Frank Nelson Doubleday began discussing a possible publication authored by Rockefeller himself.¹¹⁰ The result was a series of articles in Doubleday and Page’s *World’s Work* magazine, produced in book form the next year. It met with mixed critical reviews and was described as superficial.¹¹¹ One will certainly not get an in-depth story of Rockefeller and his private life. Far from personal, the articles were “subjected to the most careful scrutiny” from lawyers and company officials to avoid self-incrimination.¹¹² *Random Reminiscences* is intended to display Rockefeller’s desirable attributes—fully one-quarter of its 120 pages are dedicated to his philanthropy. Tarbell is noticeably absent from the book, but Rockefeller makes a few thinly veiled references to the affair. Despite its problems, the memoir is a crucial part of Rockefeller’s transformation. In saying “it is only reasonable that the public should have some firsthand facts to draw from in making up its final estimate,” Rockefeller broke from a long-held tradition.¹¹³ He had previously been content to leave his legacy to history, certain that “time will vindicate” him from wrongdoing.¹¹⁴ Now, the previously reclusive Rockefeller published a book-length defense in a popular magazine, suggesting he now felt that the public needed help making up its mind. Moreover, *Random Reminiscences* appeared at a time when many of the robber barons still shunned media attention, and when business as a whole was just beginning its acceptance of public relations.¹¹⁵ Although it was superficial and heavily edited, the fact that it was produced at all signifies a new acceptance of public opinion.

THE STANDARD OIL CASE AND THE PROGRESSIVE ERA

Clearly the fallout from Tarbell's articles gradually led to significant changes in Rockefeller and Standard Oil. Both grew to accept the new importance of public opinion and consciously sought an improved image. These events, however, did not exist in a bubble. As the Progressive Era historiography shows us, the Tarbell affair occurred during a widespread rebalancing of American society as it adjusted to an industrialized, modern world. Accordingly, combining the Progressive Era context and developments within the field of corporate public relations shows that Standard Oil's transformation is an effective case study of the business community's rebalancing to social change. Despite the seemingly endless interpretations of progressivism, the common element forming the foundation of the issue is America's rapid transformation. At the turn of the century, "the United States traded the fears and struggles of a mostly rural, fundamentally agrarian society for the fears and struggles of one that was largely urban and industrial," requiring adjustment and rebalancing.¹¹⁶ The business class was caught up in this transformation as well. Attacks from reformers convinced businessmen to rethink their secrecy or risk their enterprises being labeled soulless corporations. The combination of Progressive Era context and the Standard Oil case demonstrates that the business class, just like the American people, had to adapt to changing times, and did so by promoting an image more acceptable to the public.

The 1920s are often stereotyped as betraying progressive antitrust victories under Woodrow Wilson, but a more critical reading of history does not support this conclusion. Despite the wave of antitrust lawsuits, Alfred Chandler finds that by 1917 the American economy was dominated by huge, fully integrated corporations.¹¹⁷ The First World War created thousands of new millionaires, while the post-war repression of strikes and subsequent Red Scare curbed the power of labor.¹¹⁸ Warren G. Harding's landslide victory in 1920 proved advantageous for further corporate expansion. The subsequent Republican administrations continued favorable corporate policies and identified business leadership as the key to American prosperity.¹¹⁹ Another wave of mergers even larger than the great merger movement occurred, conspicuously without the fallout in public opinion that came with first merger movement, signifying a grudging yet discernible acceptance of big business among Americans.¹²⁰ The federal government also actively fostered international business by allowing monopolies to operate on the world market without fear of prosecution under American antitrust laws.¹²¹ Despite progressive antitrust rhetoric and hostility to corporations, corporate expansion the 1920s proves that big business had entrenched itself as a lasting presence in American life.

There is little evidence that businessmen were driven by an overwhelming quest for monopoly. While big business was certainly a reason behind transformations in American society, businessmen themselves had to adjust as well. The increasing scale of post-Civil War enterprise required industrialists to rethink conventional business practices. Early corporations were built by "tacticians rather than strategists," men who largely made things up as they went along.¹²² From Reconstruction to the 1920s, businessmen undertook a succession of actions as they gradually responded to their changing environment. Railroad companies pioneered pooling and cartels to curb price instability and rate wars; centralized trusts and holding companies had tight price control over the market; ruinous competition caused by the Panic of 1893 was a primary motivation behind the

great merger movement; integrated corporations required supervision and led to the rise of a white-collar managerial class; and the business move into politics was a self-defensive measure motivated by hostility to corporate power.¹²³ This fifty-year context of business history leaves the impression that corporate leaders were not operating according to a script, and were in fact seeking order amid uncertainty.

These previous problems largely concerned the operation of business itself, so companies could solve them with little concern for the public. The development responsible for forcing capital's consideration of the public was the rise of popular media. Even if the public was open to the muckrakers' exposés, journalists needed a medium to spread their messages. They benefited immeasurably from a post-Civil War media revolution, when "the press changed more ... than in any other previous period in American history."¹²⁴ In the late nineteenth century there was an increase in daily newspapers and popular magazines, concurrent with a sharp boost in writers' salaries, attracting "better-educated men ... to the profession."¹²⁵ The nearly five-fold increase in the number of daily newspapers in the United States from 1870 to the early 1900s allowed muckrakers to reach a nationwide audience.¹²⁶ This media expansion was a unique enemy for businessmen. While they could crush rivals and drive them out of business or bribe politicians, the battle for public opinion required new, more tactful methods.¹²⁷ It is therefore not surprising that public relations historians place the rise of their field in the muckraking era. Although there is contention in the field, historians are in agreement that the first PR initiatives came as a self-defensive response to external criticism.¹²⁸ It is evident that business adopted public relations as a reaction to reformers who advocated control of corporations.

The Standard Oil case took place in a transforming world that demanded adjustment from all parties involved. Big business, which had been growing and adapting for decades, continued changing by learning important lessons from progressives. Most importantly, businessmen learned that the public-be-damned attitude was a relic of the past century, and would no longer suit them in a world where public opinion had such significance. After several years of losing the fight for public opinion, corporations successfully captured the public as the twentieth century progressed. By the 1920s corporate imagery and public relations had become staples in big business. Standard Oil's public relations policy was far from perfect: quickened response would likely have lessened Tarbell's impact; the company was hasty in scrapping its official history after Bacon's death and could have done more to recover the project; the company could have produced more favorable press. Crucially, however, this essay shows that the Tarbell affair occurred in a transitional moment, when business as a whole began accepting the importance of public opinion. Working on very little precedent, men like John D. Rockefeller and his Standard Oil associates realized that they had to rethink the way they operated, just as many groups in the country were rethinking their own positions in the new American society. In this much larger context, the public relations response of Standard Oil and Rockefeller appears in a new light. Rather than aloof, they were part of the first wave of businessmen who had to tackle the problem of public opinion. Accordingly, the period from 1902 to 1908 does not represent a revolution in public relations, but rather an important moment in an evolution that would eventually aid the rise of big business.

CONCLUSIONS

As this essay shows, historians have been largely negative toward Rockefeller and Standard Oil for their response to Ida Tarbell. This bias perhaps stems from the fact that despite Standard's work in improving public image from 1902 to 1908, the Supreme Court ordered the trust to disband in 1911. This end result leads to harsh judgments being made without analysis of legitimate efforts made by Rockefeller and his associates in improving public opinion, and without placing the Tarbell affair in the wider context of the Progressive Era at large. Yet this failure should not take all merit from the company's legitimate public relations efforts. A hostile public coupled with Theodore Roosevelt's determination for action against Standard make it unlikely that any realistic PR efforts could have avoided the lawsuit.¹²⁹ Nonetheless, we are left with a historiography that discounts the active years between 1902 and 1908, when Rockefeller and Standard Oil radically transformed practices that had characterized business practices since the 1870s.

What critical writers do not account for is that the development of public relations was a process, not something that happened overnight. Ida Tarbell's publications began in November 1902; the book form appeared in 1904; Standard Oil began more proactive public relations approach in 1905, and hired a full-time press agent in 1906. This would indeed be a glacial pace for a company after the mid-twentieth century. The men of Standard Oil, however, were veterans of an entirely different age, when business paid little heed to the general public. Despite traditions and reservations, Rockefeller and Standard Oil adjusted to new norms, as the rest of the nation did. Between 1902 and 1908, they identified that public opinion had taken on a new significance, rethought their policies, and carried out new plans of action. While Standard Oil ultimately lost the battle for public opinion, the trust's experience is representative of a larger trend. Businessmen gradually became aware of public sentiment and worked on correcting the problem. With lessons learned from progressives, big business would steadily improve its image until by mid-century, most of the radical hostility to corporations disappeared. The Standard Oil case represents one of the earliest examples of a company facing considerable public scrutiny and seeking an answer from the emerging field of public relations.

NOTES

¹*Wall Street Journal* [WSJ], May 16, 1911. See also Ron Chernow, *Titan: The Life of John D. Rockefeller, Sr.* (New York: Random House, 1998), 537–59; and Ralph W. and Muriel E. Hidy, *Pioneering in Big Business, 1882–1911* (New York: Harper, 1955), 708–18.

²See Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York: Knopf, 1995), 5, 7, 48–49, 56–62, 91–95; Thomas C. Cochran and William Miller, *The Age of Enterprise: A Social History of Industrial America* (New York: Harper, 1961), 170–71, 286, 289, 295; Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage, 1955), 227–54; T. J. Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877–1920* (New York: HarperCollins, 2012), 291–300, 307–8, 320–21; William Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914–1932* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 130–31, 193; Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870–1920* (New York: Free Press, 2005), 147–81; Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877–1919* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1987), 188–89; Elizabeth M. Sanders, *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 3, 7–8, 93–97, 152, 268, 275–82; Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877–1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 7–8, 45–47, 52–54, 67–68, 71–75, 81, 86, 105, 139, 180, 185, 192, 297.

³Josh Boyd, “The Rhetoric of Arrogance: The Public Relations Response of the Standard Oil Trust,” *Public Relations Review* 27 (2001): 166. See below for a detailed historiography.

⁴An incident in Colorado where National Guards attacked a camp of striking miners, resulting in more than twenty deaths, including women and children. John Rockefeller, Jr. was the primary owner of the mine, and faced extreme public backlash. Kirk Hallahan, “Ivy Lee and the Rockefellers’ Response to the 1913–1914 Colorado Coal Strike,” *Journal of Public Relations Research* 14 (4): 265–315.

⁵Nancy Cohen, *The Reconstruction of American Liberalism, 1865–1918* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 233–34; Leuchtenburg, *Perils of Prosperity*, 126.

⁶Richard Hofstadter, “What Happened to the Antitrust Movement?” in *The Paranoid Style in American Politics, and Other Essays* (New York: Vintage, 1965), 188–237.

⁷This argument diverges from Gabriel Kolko’s *Triumph of Conservatism*, which asserts that progressives deliberately preserved big business. In contrast, this essay argues that the progressive attack on monopoly inadvertently played a role in the supremacy of business in the United States.

⁸More on the rise of this profession will follow, but the key works are Scott M. Cutlip, *The Unseen Power: Public Relations, A History* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1994); Marvin N. Olasky, *The Development of Corporate Public Relations, 1850–1930* (Columbia, SC: Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, 1987); Alan Raucher, *Public Relations and Business, 1900–1929* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968); Richard Tedlow, *Keeping the Corporate Image: Public Relations and Business, 1900–1950* (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1979).

⁹Hofstadter, “Antitrust,” 188–237; Louis Galambos, *The Public Image of Big Business in America, 1880–1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 222–49.

¹⁰“Public Relations,” *Oxford English Dictionary* (2014).

¹¹Quoted in Cutlip, *Unseen Power*, 515.

¹²The exact date of Rockefeller’s retirement is unsure, but it is agreed that by 1902 he was no longer the acting head of Standard Oil. Chernow, *Titan*, 342–43; Allan Nevins, *Study in Power: John D. Rockefeller, Philanthropist and Industrialist* (New York: Scribner, 1953), 2:276–77; Jan–May 1906, Folder 60, Box 117, Series 3, Allan Nevins Papers, 1912–1992 [AN], Columbia University Rare Books and Manuscript Library.

¹³Chernow, *Titan*, 343; John T. Flynn, *God’s Gold: The Story of Rockefeller and His Times* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co. 1932), 337. Historians did not seriously challenge the belief that Rockefeller alone built Standard Oil until Hidy and Hidy, *Pioneering*.

¹⁴Courtland Smith to Ivy Lee, June 16, 1915, Folder 1029, Box 138, Series C, Office of the Mssr. Rockefeller [OMR], Rockefeller Archive Center.

¹⁵Nevins, *Study in Power*, 2:277.

¹⁶Two concise business histories are Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., “The Beginnings of ‘Big Business’ in American Industry,” *The Business History Review* 33 (Spring 1959): 1–31; and Glenn Porter, *The Rise of Big Business, 1860–1910* (New York: Crowell, 1973). More comprehensive are Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977); Martin J. Sklar, *The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism, 1890–1916* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); and Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).

¹⁷McGerr, *Fierce Discontent*, 151; Naomi R. Lamoreaux, *The Great Merger Movement in American Business, 1895–1904* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1–5; Painter, *Standing at Armageddon*, 177.

¹⁸Hofstadter, “Antitrust,” 196–97; Lamoreaux, *Great Merger Movement*, 159. For dramatic fictional accounts, see Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle* (London: Doubleday, Jabber and Co., 1906); and Jack London, *The Iron Heel* (New York: Macmillan, 1908).

¹⁹Lears, *Rebirth*, 144; Roland Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 2–5; Porter, *Big Business*, 85–87; Wiebe, *Search for Order*, xiii, 4, 52–54. For economic periphery vs. core, see Sanders, *Roots of Reform*, 13–20.

²⁰The most obvious groups are the Grangers, Greenbackers, and Populists. Other radical groups also rose in the 1880s. For early anti-monopoly movements, see Cochran and Miller, *Age of Enterprise*, 164–71; and Joseph Dorfman, *The Economic Mind in American Civilization, Volume 3, 1865–1918* (New York: Viking, 1949), ch. 2. For radicalism, see Beverly Gage, *The Day Wall Street Exploded: A Story of America in its First Age of Terror* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), chs. 3–5.

²¹Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (New York: George Braziller, 1959), 44–46, 201; T. J. Jackson Lears, “The Managerial Revitalization of the Rich” in *Ruling America: A History of Wealth and Power in a Democracy*, eds. Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 181–87; McGerr, *Fierce Discontent*, 1–13. For Social Darwinism in practice, see Andrew Carnegie, *The Gospel of Wealth and Other Timely Essays* (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1933). For a case study in upper-class culture, see Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850–1896* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

²²Alan Dawley, “The Abortive Rule of Big Money” in Fraser and Gerstle, ed., *Ruling America*, 149–51; Gage, *Day Wall Street Exploded*, 95; Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 136, 140–41, 231–32. For contemporary opinions on business, see Galambos, *Public Image*, 117–20.

²³Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* ([1899]; New York: Dover, 1994), 27–46; Painter, *Standing at Armageddon*, 112–14; Gage, *Day Wall Street Exploded*, 85; Melvyn Dubofsky and Foster Rhea Dulles, *Labor in America: A History, 8th Edition* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 2010).

²⁴Galambos, *Public Image*, 119.

²⁵Nevins, *Study in Power*, 2:341–42. Nevins’s assertion that Tarbell’s *History* was considered historical fact is supported by contemporary reviews. See *Atlanta Constitution*, Jan. 11, and Feb. 2, 1903; *Independent*, Sept. 17, 1903. Historians also took Tarbell’s work as historical evidence for decades. See Matthew Josephson, *The Robber Barons: The Great American Capitalists, 1861–1901* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1934).

²⁶Ida M. Tarbell, *The History of the Standard Oil Company* ([1904] New York: P. Smith, 1925), 2:231; Hidy and Hidy, *Pioneering*, 649–52; Nevins, *Study in Power*, 2:341–42.

²⁷Flynn, *God’s Gold*, 200, 460, 483; Allan Nevins, *John D. Rockefeller: The Heroic Age of American Enterprise* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1940), 1:344–46; 2:520–23, 548–54; and Nevins, *Study in Power*, 2:320–42, 349–50.

²⁸Boyd, “Rhetoric,” 163–78.

²⁹N. S. B. Gras, “Shifts in Public Relations,” *Bulletin of the Business Historical Society* 19 (Oct. 1945): 130, 143; Lears, *Rebirth*, 297–98; McGerr, *Fierce Discontent*, 159.

³⁰Cutlip, *Unseen Power*, 55–56; and *Public Relations History: From the 17th to the 20th Century, the Antecedents* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1995), 193–96; Olasky, *Corporate Public Relations*, 30–31; Raucher, *Public Relations and Business*, 22–24; Tedlow, *Corporate Image*, 13, 36–38.

³¹Bruce Bringhurst, *Antitrust and the Oil Monopoly: The Standard Oil Cases, 1890–1911* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979), 28, 80, 102–3, 180–82; Hidy and Hidy, *Pioneering*, 652–62, 698–707.

³²Chernow, *Titan*, 525–26, 532–33, 723–24, and notes 26–28 and 57–66.

³³Among the most important interpretations of progressivism are Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*; Arthur S. Link, “What Happened to the Progressive Movement in the 1920s?,” *The American Historical Review* 64 (July 1959): 833–51; Robert Wiebe, *Businessmen and Reform: A Study of the Progressive Movement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962); Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Reinterpretation of American History, 1900–1916* (New York: Free Press, 1963); Wiebe, *Search for Order*; James Weinstein, *The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State: 1900–1918* (Boston: Beacon, 1968); Peter Filene, “An Obituary for the Progressive Movement,” *American Quarterly* 22 (Spring 1970): 20–34; T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Daniel T. Rodgers, “In Search of Progressivism,” *Reviews in American History* 10 (Dec. 1982): 113–32; Painter, *Standing at Armageddon*; Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Sanders, *Roots of Reform*; Cohen, *American Liberalism*; McGerr, *Fierce Discontent*; Gage, *Day Wall Street Exploded*; Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation*. McGerr, *Fierce Discontent*. Kolko, *Triumph of Conservatism*; Filene, “Obituary for the Progressive Movement.”

³⁴The PR field was generally established by the 1920s. For context see Cutlip, *Unseen Power*; Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making the Way for Modernity, 1920–1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); and Marchand, *Corporate Soul*.

³⁵Raucher, *Public Relations and Business*, 9.

³⁶Cutlip, *Unseen Power*, 10–11.

³⁷Olasky, *Corporate Public Relations*, 29.

³⁸Edward L. Bernays, *Crystallizing Public Opinion, New Edition* ([1923]; New York: Liveright, 1961), iii, xxxvii; Cutlip, *Unseen Power*, 176–77.

³⁹Starr J. Murphy [Murphy] to Frederick T. Birchall, Apr. 11, 1906, Folder 864, Box 115, Series C, OMR; *WSJ*, Nov. 28, 1903. See also Nevins, *John D. Rockefeller*, 1:344–46; Chernow, *Titan*, 525.

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⁴⁰Folder- Code, Box 118, Series 3; Code cipher cards, Box 121, Series 3; Walter F. Taylor, “History of the Standard Oil Company,” unpublished manuscript, page 114, Box 134, Series 3, AN.

⁴¹Carnegie, *Gospel*, 1–5; Cutlip, *Public Relations History*, 187–90; David Nasaw, “Gilded Age Gospels” in Fraser and Gerstle, eds., *Ruling America*, 122–48; Tedlow, *Corporate Image*, 1–5; Trachtenberg, *Incorporation of America*, 6.

⁴²Marchand, *Corporate Soul*, 8, 42–44. Marchand shows that Vanderbilt’s quote was taken out of context, but it represented the same sentiment.

⁴³Jean Strouse, *Morgan: American Financier* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), 454–55; *Chicago Record Herald*, Dec. 10, 1908; *Chicago Examiner*, Dec. 10, 1908; *Chicago Daily Journal*, Dec. 9, 1908, all in Clippings: Trip to Chicago, 1908 Dec., Box 17, Series 1: Biographical and Historical, Subseries B: Clippings, 1899–1918, John Pierpont Morgan Papers, ARC1196, The Pierpont Morgan Library.

⁴⁴Tarbell, *History*, 1:viii. Also Ida M. Tarbell, *All in the Day’s Work: An Autobiography* (New York: Macmillan, 1939), 207.

⁴⁵Early historians tend to portray the plan as Rockefeller’s conception. See Josephson, *Robber Barons*, 113–16, 160; and C. C. Regier, *The Era of the Muckrakers* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1932), 123–24. In reality the plan was hatched by railroad companies and Rockefeller was apparently never keen on the idea. See H. W. Brands, *American Colossus: The Triumph of Capitalism, 1865–1900* (New York: Knopf, 2010), 87–88; Chernow, *Titan*, 135–45.

⁴⁶Chernow, *Titan*, 212. For documents regarding the 1879 case see Folder 11, Box 110, Series 3, AN.

⁴⁷*New York Times*, Mar. 2, 1892; Bringham, *Antitrust*, 10–21; Chernow, *Titan*, 231–34; Hidy and Hidy, *Pioneering*, 219–32; Nevins, *John D. Rockefeller*, 2:140–57. For New Jersey’s incorporation laws, see Cochran and Miller, *Age of Enterprise*, 190; and Christopher Grandy, “New Jersey Corporate Chartermongering, 1875–1929,” *Journal of Economic History* 49 (Sept. 1989): 677–92.

⁴⁸See Bringham, *Antitrust*.

⁴⁹Henry Demarest Lloyd, “Story of a Great Monopoly,” *Atlantic Monthly* (Mar. 1881): 317–34.

⁵⁰Henry Demarest Lloyd, *Wealth Against Commonwealth* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1894), 44.

⁵¹See, for example, the following reviews: *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Oct. 27, 1894, 10; *New York Observer and Chronicle*, Nov. 8, 1894, 443; *NYT*, Dec. 30, 1894, 23.

⁵²Tarbell, *History*, 1:ch. 1.

⁵³Tarbell, *Day’s Work*, 211–13.

⁵⁴Unsigned to E. Parmalee Prentice, Dec. 4, 1902, Folder 864, Box 115, Series C, OMR.

⁵⁵Allan Nevins did not find the matter in correspondence either. Notes from Folder 56, 1902; and Notes from Folder 57, 1903, Box 119, Series 3, AN.

⁵⁶Chernow, *Titan*, 442.

⁵⁷Tarbell, *Day’s Work*, 202.

⁵⁸Louis Galambos made a great contribution with *The Public Image of Big Business*, but his limited survey size confines its scope.

⁵⁹Chernow, *Titan*, 449; Hidy and Hidy, *Pioneering*, 676.

⁶⁰Bringham, *Antitrust*, 133; Hidy and Hidy, *Pioneering*, 682–83.

⁶¹Chernow, *Titan*, 501; Peter Collier and David Horowitz, *The Rockefellers: An American Dynasty* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1976), 45. As late as 1905 Rockefeller’s Westchester estate was still open to the public. *Country Calendar*, Nov. 1905, 632–37, Folder 3, Box 1, Series T, OMR.

⁶²Gage, *Wall Street*, esp. 25, 59, 64–65; McGerr, *Fierce Discontent*, 39, 119–20, 140–43.

⁶³Chernow, *Titan*, 458–59, 508–9.

⁶⁴For quotation, see May–July 1905, Folder 59, Box 117, Series 3, AN. Jan.–Apr. 1905, Folder 59, Box 117; Notes from Folder 59, 1905, Box 119, Series 3, AN.

⁶⁵Jan.–Apr. 1905, Folder 59, Box 117, Series 3, AN.

⁶⁶Apr.–Nov. 1905, Folder 59, Box 117, Series 3, AN. For pamphlet examples, “The Standard Oil Company: A Review of Ida M. Tarbell’s History,” reproduced from *The Nation*, Jan. 5, 1905, Folder 3, Box 1, Series T; and Gilbert Holland Montague, “The Legend of the Standard Oil Company,” reproduced from the *North American Review*, Sept. 1905, Folder 885, Box 118, Series C, OMR. Hidy and Hidy, *Pioneering*, 654–57.

⁶⁷Hidy and Hidy, *Pioneering*, 663; Gilbert Holland Montague, *The Rise and Progress of the Standard Oil Company* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1903); Tarbell, *Day’s Work*, 240–1.

⁶⁸Harold J. Howland, “Standard Oil,” reprinted from *Outlook*, Oct. 1907; Elbert Hubbard, “The Standard Oil Company,” reprinted from *The Fra*, 1910, Folder 885, Box 118, Series C, OMR.

⁶⁹JDR to Murphy, May 26, 1908, Folder 865, Box 115, Series C, OMR; JDR, Jan.–July 1908, Folder 62, Box 117, Series 3, AN. The original article was Ambrose Paré Winston, “The Formation of Public Opinion as Exemplified by the Standard Oil Case,” *Bulletin of the Washington University Association* 6 (Apr. 1908): 102–48. The pamphlet, “Public Opinion and the Standard Oil Company” (St. Louis: Nixon-Jones Publishing Co., 1908) is located in Box 121, Series 3, AN, and the New-York Historical Society Pamphlets Collection.

⁷⁰John J. McLaurin, “The Oil Situation in Kansas,” *Outlook*, June 17, 1905, 427. For the original article, see F. S. Barde, “The Oil Fields and Pipe Lines of Kansas,” *Outlook*, May 6, 1905.

⁷¹Barde, “Oil Fields,” 19.

⁷²McLaurin, “Oil Situation,” 430.

⁷³Frederick T. Gates [Gates] to JDR, June 19, 1905, Folder 864, Box 115, Series C, OMR.

⁷⁴JDR to Gates, June 21, 1905, Folder 864, Box 115, Series C, OMR.

⁷⁵Articles on the scandal entirely filled a large scrapbook in Allan Nevins’s collection. Box 123, Series 3, AN.

⁷⁶Chernow, *Titan*, 499–500; Flynn, *God’s Gold*, 391–92; Nevins, *Study in Power*, 2:345–47.

⁷⁷Criticisms ranged from his family life to his home décor. Ida M. Tarbell, “John D. Rockefeller: A Character Study,” *McClure’s Magazine* (July 1905): 227–31, 233; and “John D. Rockefeller: A Character Study, Part Two,” *McClure’s Magazine* (Aug. 1905): 386–87, 391, 393–94. For quotation, see Tarbell, “Character Study Part 2,” 386.

⁷⁸Steve Weinberg, *Taking on the Trust* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), 233–39.

⁷⁹Chernow, *Titan*, 525; Nevins, *Study in Power*, 2:330, 349.

⁸⁰*NYT*, May 6, 1906; *WSJ*, May 8, 1906.

⁸¹Clarke, *Life and Memories*, 1–2, 65, 102–11, 345; *NYT*, Feb. 28, 1923; “Table Ba4335–4360: Annual earnings of full-time employees, by industry: 1900–1929,” *Historical Statistics of the United States, Millennial Edition Online*, <http://hsus.cambridge.org.avoserv.library.fordham.edu/HSUSWeb/search/searchTable.do?id=Ba4335-4360>.

⁸²Clarke, *Life and Memories*, 352.

⁸³Clarke, *Life and Memories*, 352.

⁸⁴Clarke, *Life and Memories*, 352.

⁸⁵George D. Rogers to JDR, Aug. 9, 1906, Folder 864, Box 115, Series C, OMR; *New York Herald*, [*NYH*] month of Aug. 1906, Reel 515, New York Public Library Microforms Division [NYPL].

⁸⁶*NYT*, Sept. 20 and 25, 1907.

⁸⁷*NYT*, Sept. 23, 1908.

⁸⁸F. L. Barstow to JDR, Apr. 5, 1907, Folder 890, Box 118, Series C, OMR.

⁸⁹Barstow to JDR, Apr. 2, 1907, Folder 890, Box 118, Series C, OMR; Clarke, *Life and Memories*, 354.

⁹⁰William H. Libby to Barstow, with enclosed revision suggestions to manuscript, May 3, 1907, Folder 890, Box 118, Series C, OMR; Barstow to JDR, Apr. 26, 1907; and “Criticism on Chapter I,” Folder- Parts of History of S.O.C. by Dr. Bacon, Box 122, Series 3, AN.

⁹¹Completed chapters are in Parts of History of S.O.C. by Dr. Bacon, Box 122, AN and Folder 890, Box 118, Series C, OMR.

⁹²Barstow to JDR, May 13, 1907, Folder 890, Box 118, Series C, OMR; Chernow, *Titan*, 526; Clarke, *Life and Memories*, 354. The replacement history is James R. Day, *The Raid on Prosperity* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1908).

⁹³Marchand, *Corporate Soul*, 10, 26–35.

⁹⁴John D. Archbold, “The Standard Oil Company: Some Facts and Figures,” *Saturday Evening Post*, Dec. 7, 1907, pp. 3–5, 7, in Folder 1, Box 2, Series T, OMR.

⁹⁵Chernow, *Titan*, 526–28.

⁹⁶Nevins, *Study in Power*, 2:350.

⁹⁷Cutlip, *Unseen Power*, 56; Raucher, *Public Relations and Business*, 24.

⁹⁸Clarke, *Life and Memories*, 359.

⁹⁹Hidy and Hidy, *Pioneering*, 699–704; Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 195–98.

¹⁰⁰See Cutlip, *Unseen Power*, 1–8, for early PR efforts.

¹⁰¹Flynn, *God’s Gold*, 483.

¹⁰²*NYH*, Aug. 1 and Aug. 4, 1906, Reel 515, NYPL.

¹⁰³Clarke to Murphy, Nov. 1, 1907 and Murphy to JDR, July 16, 1909, Folder 865, Box 115, Series C, OMR.

¹⁰⁴Chernow, *Titan*, 526.

¹⁰⁵*Sun* [Baltimore], July 29 and Nov. 28, 1903; *WSJ*, Nov. 28, 1903. The sole publication found that gave Rockefeller a more human side with a brief biographical sketch is “John D. Rockefeller as a Type,” *Peterson Magazine*, Feb. 1896, Folder 2, Box 1, Series T, OMR.

¹⁰⁶William Hoster, *New York American*, Sept. 29, 1907, Reel F44, NYPL; Chernow, *Titan*, 527–30.

¹⁰⁷“The Human Side of John D. Rockefeller,” *Women’s Home Journal*, Jan. 1907; F. O. March, “The Human Side of John D. Rockefeller,” *Leslie’s Weekly*, May 16, 1907, Folder 3, Box 1, Series T, OMR.

¹⁰⁸In the 1890s, magazines rarely covered Rockefeller. H. G. Warren, *Metropolitan Magazine*, Nov. 1898; and John W. Harrington, *Munsey’s Magazine*, Aug. 1899, make no mention of him, despite covering his brother William and other Standard Oil officials. *Peterson Magazine*, June 18, 1897, devotes a few sentences to John, but contains no pictures of his estate, as they do for others. For the first multipage spread, see “John D. Rockefeller’s Pocantico Estate,” *Country Calendar*, Nov. 1905. Pocantico received an entire issue of coverage in *House Beautiful*, June 1909. All in Folders 2 and 3, Box 1, Series T, OMR.

¹⁰⁹Gates to JDR, Oct. 16, 1907, Folder 865, Box 115, Series C, OMR.

¹¹⁰C. M. Pratt to Junior, Jan. 22, 1908, Folder 865, Box 115, Series C, OMR.

¹¹¹Chernow, *Titan*, 533.

¹¹²JDR June–July 1908, Folder 62, Box 117, Series 3, AN.

¹¹³John D. Rockefeller, *Random Reminiscences of Men and Events* ([1909] Tarrytown, NY: Rockefeller Archive Center, 1984), 1, 4.

¹¹⁴Chernow, *Titan*, 442–43.

¹¹⁵Recall J. P. Morgan’s trip to Chicago. Also Marchand, *Corporate Soul*, 42–44.

¹¹⁶Quotation in Painter, x *Armageddon*; Wiebe, *Search for Order*, 301.

¹¹⁷For this view on the 1920s, see David M. Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 32–35. Chandler, *Visible Hand*, 285.

¹¹⁸Cochran and Miller, *Age of Enterprise*, 185; Dubofsky and Dulles, *Labor in America*, 188, 204–21; Gage, *Wall Street*, 17; Leuchtenburg, *Perils of Prosperity*, 39; McGerr, *Fierce Discontent*, 305–15; Painter, *Armageddon*, 346–80; Wiebe, *Search for Order*, 288.

¹¹⁹Gage, *Wall Street*, 229; Leuchtenburg, *Perils of Prosperity*, 9, 84–97; McGerr, *Fierce Discontent*, 310–15.

¹²⁰Cochran and Miller, *Age of Enterprise*, 348; Galambos, *Public Image*, 261–63; Hofstadter, “Antitrust,” 193; Leuchtenburg, *Perils of Prosperity*, 189–90; Porter, *Big Business*, 85–101; Tedlow, *Corporate Image*, 25–26; Trachtenberg, *Incorporation of America*, 4.

¹²¹Emily S. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890–1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 13, 23, 70, 122; Joan Hoff Wilson, *American Business and Foreign Policy, 1920–1933* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1971), 3–6, 17.

¹²²Quote in Wiebe, *Search for Order*, 18. See also Thomas Kessner, *Capital City: New York City and the Men Behind America’s Rise to Economic Dominance, 1860–1900* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), xi–xix; and Porter, *Big Business*, 19.

¹²³Porter, *Big Business*, 30, 36–37. Cochran and Miller, *Age of Enterprise*, 129–30, 140–41; Porter, *Big Business*, 61–67. Lamoreaux, *Merger Movement*, 87. Chandler, *Visible Hand*, 1–12. Nasaw, “Gilded Age Gospels,” 138–40.

¹²⁴Ted Curtis Smythe, *The Gilded Age Press, 1865–1900* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2003), x.

¹²⁵Cutlip, *Unseen Power*, 5; Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 191; Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1885–1905* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), 11–12; Smythe, *Gilded Age Press*, ix–x.

¹²⁶Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 188; Smythe, *Gilded Age Press*, ix–x.

¹²⁷Although as Hofstadter pointed out, many magazines had funding and advertising pulled by allies of business (*Age of Reform*, 195–96), S. S. McClure asserted that muckraking was expensive and economic attacks were potentially ruinous (S. S. McClure to Allan Nevins, Feb. 2, 1933, Box 27, Series 2, AN).

¹²⁸Cutlip, *Unseen Power*, 3; Marchand, *Corporate Soul*, 2–3; Raucher, *Public Relations and Business*, 19; Tedlow, *Corporate Image*, 15–18.

¹²⁹For examples of Roosevelt’s mindset, see *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt*, ed. Elting T. Morison (8 vols., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952), 5:388, 409, 535–36. In the same period, several other corporations employed publicity bureaus hoping to avoid antitrust suits and ultimately failed, showing that PR campaigns were not infallible. Boyd, “Rhetoric,” 166; Cutlip, *Unseen Power*, 8.