Subject: The Men Who Built America
Posted by Wayne Parham on Thu, 11 Jun 2020 14:32:26 GMT
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For the past few nights, I've been watching "The Men Who Built America" on Amazon Prime. It's a one-season mini-series documentary about industrialization after around 1865. History Channel did it in 2012, but I missed it until now.

I love this kind of stuff - It's very interesting to me. I always found myself having a love/hate thing for the powerful individuals and companies around 1900. This series reminded me why.

Sometimes I get bent out of shape with today's politics. Sometimes modern corporate and political leaders seem so greedy and biased. And they can be, no doubt. But it's nothing like it was in 1900.

Mostly, my interest was always the Edison/Tesla thing. I have been familiar with the dynamics of Edison/Morgan versus Tesla/Westinghouse since I was a teenager. They're electronics guys, so I felt the Tesla/Edison arguments to be in my wheelhouse. But I only knew a little about Vanderbilt, Rockefeller and Carnegie. This series showed me more about the dynamics between these men and how they affected America and the world.The Men Who Built America

Subject: Re: The Men Who Built America
Posted by Rusty on Thu, 11 Jun 2020 17:15:37 GMT
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Industrial age Feudalists almost. The history of capitalism has been pretty consistent in that monopolies develop, politicians are bought, and the business cycle has produced a consistent downturn in the economy every 7-10 years on average. We've had three already this century. Covid, is not an excuse, it's just a trigger for what was inevitable.
Teddy Roosevelt was by today's standards a very progressive president. He was very aggressive, (like his personality), in reigning in monopolistic companies. Like the gentlemen you mention. Bully for him.
The Tesla, Edison rivalry was really interesting. History seemed to favor Edison in American education. Portrayed as all American, hard working, doggedly never giving up on his ideas until he succeeded. His dark side was never alluded to. Tesla though, was like a strange gypsy foreigner. Eccentric and aloof.
Not taking away from Edison's great contributions, but Tesla. Whew, that dude was maybe an extraterrestrial.
Hope that show comes to one of my Roku freebies sometime. I bet that is interesting.

Subject: Re: The Men Who Built America
Posted by Azuri on Sun, 16 Aug 2020 03:46:04 GMT
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My take on Tesla/Edison was that Tesla was the innovator while Edison was the one who "borrowed" those ideas for the purpose of making patents. Edison had more inside contacts than Tesla, but instead of working with Tesla, who I believe was much smarter, he just stepped over him.

The American way, right?

Subject: Re: The Men Who Built America
Posted by Wayne Parham on Sun, 16 Aug 2020 17:05:21 GMT
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I don't consider deception to be the American way. I know the Russians used to see capitalists like robber barons and they saw tovarish (comrades) as honest hard-working men. But that's short sighted - There are deceptive men of all types. Americans also tend to respect honesty and integrity. To be clever doesn't require dishonesty.

So I think all good people of any political, cultural and religious backgrounds probably tend to like honesty and cleverness, and we all enjoy watching the underdog make the big win. I think good people also tend to dislike gains that come from deception and foul play of all kinds.

I think those that employ deception to win just hope they can do it secretly. They pretend to be something they're not.

Subject: Re: The Men Who Built America
Posted by Barryso on Sun, 16 Aug 2020 18:54:44 GMT
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There was a very good documentary on RCA years ago. Forgive me, the name escapes me.

But the similarities of how RCA and Microsoft went about running their operations while maintaining their monopolies were striking. They both ran over anything that got (or might have gotten) in their way. They were both vicious.

It's amazing how little (other than the technology) had changed over 60 to 80 years.

Subject: Re: The Men Who Built America
Posted by Wayne Parham on Mon, 17 Aug 2020 02:05:50 GMT
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I remember seeing a special about RCA too. As I recall, I was a little disappointed in them because I always liked that company and its accomplishments. But they had done some seedy

stuff, and that disappointed me, just like you've said. Took some of their glow, in my eyes.

Subject: Re: The Men Who Built America
Posted by Rusty on Mon, 17 Aug 2020 13:30:07 GMT
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They finally hauled some of these tycoons in before congress to explain what more than seems like anti trust behavior. Glad they did. Question is, will any resolution come from it. I'm cynical I guess but this kind of behavior with big corporations is a built in factor of capitalism for as long as it's existed. We have gone through some decades now of disparaging big government and anti regulatory mantra. The pendulum swings like pendulums do one way and another. I like the ideas of the economist Richard Wolff. Promote worker co-ops. Cut into the board room with employee participation and democratize the work place. It maybe an idealistic wish, but it can and is a reality.

There's a good investigative piece on PBS Frontline. The Rise and Reign of Jeff Bezos.

Subject: Re: The Men Who Built America
Posted by Wayne Parham on Mon, 17 Aug 2020 15:56:56 GMT
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I'll look that one up.

I'm not sure if it's some kind of weird bias I have, but I have even less respect for the "tycoons" in the last 50 years than the ones from 100 years ago that we were initially discussing in this thread.

For example, I always thought Steve Wozniak was the real deal, but never thought much of Steve Jobs. Jobs was charismatic and kinda "hip, slick and cool." But he was really just a salesman. I always thought similarly of Bill Gates, but he wasn't even cool. He was just the first famous nerd. And even more so, guys like Zuckerberg. Talk about yawner technology. I just totally don't care. Definitely isn't like the guys that put us on the moon.

But they have been extremely successful. Most people I know would equate that to mean they're really smart guys. I don't. Not at all. I see them much like the robber barons of 100 years ago, all shuck and jive.

So I have to ask myself, how much of this is some kind of weird bias, maybe even envy? Why do I see them as charlatans? I mean, the Apple II was awesome, and the Lisa and the Mac even more so. Windows has been extremely useful for almost everyone on the planet, and after around 1995, it was actually pretty good software. I still can't find anything good about Facebook, but I don't think I should be too judgmental. It's fun for a lot of people. Most people don't want to develop their own blogs, so Facebook helps them publish online.

Still, the "tech giants" today mostly just gross me out.

Subject: Re: The Men Who Built America
Posted by Barryso on Mon, 17 Aug 2020 18:13:52 GMT
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Steve Wozniak realized he got lucky after co-founding Apple. He took the pile of money he made from it and decided to live the life he wanted to live. He has my utmost respect.

Steve Jobs wasn't content with the one-in-a-million bit of luck and set out to prove it wasn't a fluke. OK, eventually he did prove it wasn't a fluke but it took him many decades to do it. He also burned through a lot of other people's money on the road to prove his point.

Gate's products were so awful for the first few decades that I moved my personal computers to Linux. Bad enough having to deal with miserable Microsoft products during the day at work but there was no way it was following me home.

Going back to RCA, it still amazes me that it was such a massive, huge company but still controlled and run by one person, David Sarnoff. When he retired from the board the company just couldn't seem to do anything right. Don't know if that started while he was still on the board or if it was right after but RCA didn't seem to be able to do anything right in the 1970's.

Before the 70's? They were the 800 pound gorilla that had their hands in everything. Before the 70's you couldn't imagine a world that didn't have RCA.

Subject: Re: The Men Who Built America
Posted by Rusty on Mon, 17 Aug 2020 21:56:57 GMT
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Going back to RCA, it still amazes me that it was such a massive, huge company but still controlled and run by one person, David Sarnoff. When he retired from the board the company just couldn't seem to do anything right. Don't know if that started while he was still on the board or if it was right after but RCA didn't seem to be able to do anything right in the 1970's.

Before the 70's? They were the 800 pound gorilla that had their hands in everything. Before the 70's you couldn't imagine a world that didn't have RCA.

What I have read is that from the 70's to present time, workers pay have stagnated, CEO compensation and the rest of upper management has increased many times over. Unions have been gutted. Globalization realized for cheap labor. And financialization of our economy has taken precedence over the 'real' economy. Quarterly short term winnings and stock buybacks in the stock market are the goal these days. And debt, mountains of it.
