OF MODERN POP CULTURE

America's journey through nature, music, art & technology

by Alex Cosper

Based on the musical project:

Production, words and music by Alex Cosper

1. TIME TUNNELS
2. WIND AROUND THE CENTURY
3. SPIES AROUND THE WORLD
4. IT DIDN'T HAPPEN IN HISTORY
5. 1900 ELECTRIC
6. 1910 MEDICINE
7. 1911 HOLLYWOOD
8. MOVIES, WAR AND PROPAGANDA
9. TVS AND TRANSISTORS
10. SPIES REPRISE
11. WAY DOWN
12. 1973 ENERGY
13. COLD WAR COLA WARS
14. COMPUTER REVOLUTION MEDLEY
15. TUNEFUL EDUCATION

Listen to the album at https://www.Sunsetrip.com

11. WAY DOWN

"Way Down" Lyrics

words and music by Alex Cosper

© Orange Underworld Music, BMI

Way down below the ground
are remains of beasts before us
arms around, escape the ground
to the trees up in the forest
Back home the nightlife swings
with the test of long commitment
Way down below the ground
is the root of these conditions

Way down, way down, way down, way down
Way down, way down, way down, deep inside

Billions and billions in the hands of industry
why can't you see what this world has done to you and me?

In the fast lane on the freeway, it's a race to make impressions
Way down below the ground, is the truth of these concessions

Way down, way down, way down, way down
Way down, way down, way down, deep inside

Billions and billions in the hands of industry
why can't you see what this world has done to you and me?

In the long run, no one wins
when the seeds of hate are planted
we're burning the candle at both ends
and taking it all for granted

Way down, way down, way down, way down
Way down, way down, way down, deep inside

https://youtu.be/ydByTzRkkgA?si=Lg9cNTRFmkbmHIvL

<iframe width="560" height="315" src="https://www.youtube.com/embed/ydByTzRkkgA?si=Lg9cNTRFmkbmHIvL" title="YouTube video player" frameborder="0" allow="accelerometer; autoplay; clipboard-write; encrypted-media; gyroscope; picture-in-picture; web-share" referrerpolicy="strict-origin-when-cross-origin" allowfullscreen></iframe>

Twain's View of the Gilded Age

Time tunnels can get slippery when we explore the history of the oil industry. Why would anyone want to do that? To learn how our world of energy is controlled by an industry that keeps pushing cost of living prices higher and higher. Once you have a clear understanding of how oil accounts for thousands of petroleum and plastic products, and how a lot of its waste ends up in the air, water and landfills - then you'll be able to see how our planet is compromised by greedy polluters.

America's discovery of oil in the 1860s, along with the expansion of railroad tracks and telegraph wires led to "the gilded age." That term was coined by writer Mark Twain, who made many famous quotes often cited by a wide range of 20th century writers. It reflected the time period from about 1870 to 1900 when America went through a period of rapid change from rural to city life. New industries such as railroads, steel production and financial innovations created a long list of new jobs available more in cities than the countryside.

Author Mark Twain

During the gilded age the income gap widened between owners and workers, as a handful of bosses rose to manage millions of corporate workers. It was an economic boom that attracted immigrants from around the world, much like the California Gold Rush of 1849. But optimism began to diminish with the Panic of 1893 and the subsequent depression. Americans became increasingly aware of "robber barons" who emerged as millionaires from building railroad, oil and steel empires.

Twain, whose birthname was Samuel Clemens, came from Missouri but moved west to work for his brother,

Orion Clemens, who was influential in guiding him through his career in printing and journalism. Orion was the Secretary of the Nevada Territory under Governor James Nye, who was appointed by President Lincoln in 1861. Nevada was admitted to the United States three years later. Nye later ended up in an insane asylum. Meanwhile, Twain gained notoriety as a writer for one of California's earliest newspapers, *The Sacramento Union,* a year after his move in 1864 to San Francisco, where he resided. He also wrote articles about his visit to Hawaii.

"Mark Twain and Orion Clemens"
By Philip Ashley Fanning, University of Alabama Press, January 2006
https://www.uapress.ua.edu/9780817353230/mark-twain-and-orion-clemens/

His articles began to spread to other publications including the *New-York Tribune* and *Buffalo Express*. He then became an author of several famous novels including *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884). Among his close friends was inventor Nikola Tesla, as Twain enjoyed exploring science. In 1909 he met Tesla's rival inventor Thomas Edison.

Twain was known for a blend of social commentary and humor. Even though he earned an enormous amount of wealth from his writing, his big investments in new technology that quickly became obsolete brought him financial trouble. Even his publishing firm, which released the memoirs of President Ulysses Grant, began losing money.

Like many Americans, Twain fell victim to the financial Panic of 1893. What saved Twain financially was a relationship with a financier named Henry Rogers from Standard Oil. Rogers took control of Twain's finances, first by having him file bankruptcy in 1894. Twain then went on a global lecture tour to help pay off creditors. His speaking engagements were popular because of his comedic presentations.

"The 19th Century Start-Ups That Cost Mark Twain His Fortune"
Time, by Richard Zacks
https://time.com/4297572/mark-twain-bad-business/

By 1900 Twain had paid off his debts, which amounted to about $80,000. From then on he often wrote about his philosophies against materialism and imperialism. Twain died fairly wealthy in 1910 at 74, as President Taft commented, "he has made an enduring part of American literature."

"Who Is Mark Twain?"
Los Angeles Times, by Tim Rutten, April 22, 2009
https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2009-apr-22-et-rutten22-story.html

Presidents Try to Stop Monopolies

President Theodore Roosevelt was considered a "conservative progressive" by his peers. He was strongly against big corporations becoming too powerful, although he also distinguished between good and bad companies.

Journalist Ida Tarbell's 1904 book *The History of the*

Standard Oil Company created shockwaves across America how powerful the oil giant had become. The book explained how Standard Oil had become a monopoly, which led to new anti-trust laws and the creation of the Federal Trade Commission. Standard Oil was a trust represented by one person, John D. Rockefeller. Tarbell's book pointed the finger at Rockefeller as a business opportunist who manipulated competitors. President TR called investigative reporters like Tarbell "muckrakers." Tarbell, however, disliked that label and preferred the term "historian."

Under President Taft, the Justice Department ordered Standard Oil to be broken up into 39 companies. Standard Oil of New Jersey became Exxon while Standard Oil of California evolved into Chevron and Standard Oil of Ohio was acquired by BP. Other companies to grow out of the Standard Oil breakup included ConocoPhillips, Royal Dutch Shell and Marathon Oil.

Ultimately, the splitting of Standard Oil into multiple firms helped exponentially expand the Rockefeller empire, since John D. Rockefeller and his family members invested in the various new companies that grew into corporate giants. This effect infuriated Roosevelt and it became part of the baggage that divided him with his hand-picked successor Taft. TR felt betrayed by Taft, who replaced several TR policies with more corporate elite-friendly policies. That's why Roosevelt decided to run against Taft in 1912 for the GOP nomination then unsuccessfully as a

third party "Bull Moose" progressive.

"Standard Oil"
Britannica.com, May 9, 2025
https://www.britannica.com/money/Standard-Oil

Other Monopolies Besides Oil

Oil wasn't the only monopoly for progressives to worry about in the early 20th century. Other monopolies that emerged in the late the 19th century involved the telegraph, telephone, phonograph, film and radio industries, largely controlled by the patent holders of those technologies. UK mining company DeBeers was able to fix diamond prices by controlling the supply of the gem in South Africa.

Western Union was among the first monopolies of modern communications technology, as it controlled the telegraph industry. Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone and launched the company that would have over a century-long monopoly of telephone wiring systems, American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T).

Thomas Edison forced users of his phonograph and film technologies to pay royalities toward the use of his patents on those products. The first marketer of radio equipment was UK firm Marconi, which held a near monopoly in the US via its subsidiary American Marconi for ship-to-shore communications gear until selling its assets to GE in 1919. These patents and companies were the result of a series

of mergers with small firms experimenting in specific fields of similar research. The idea of radio being a form of mass media was an after thought following its initial use for communication between ships or airplanes with ground stations.

The public's concern about monopolies fueled the popularity of a new board game called *The Landlord's Game*, patented by Lizzie Magie in 1904. She was the daughter of an associate of Abraham Lincoln named James Magie, an Illinois newspaper publisher and co-founder of the Republican Party. She was a feminist and activist who became the first woman awarded a US patent for a board game, which was designed to educate people about how monopolies were dangerous to a democratic society.

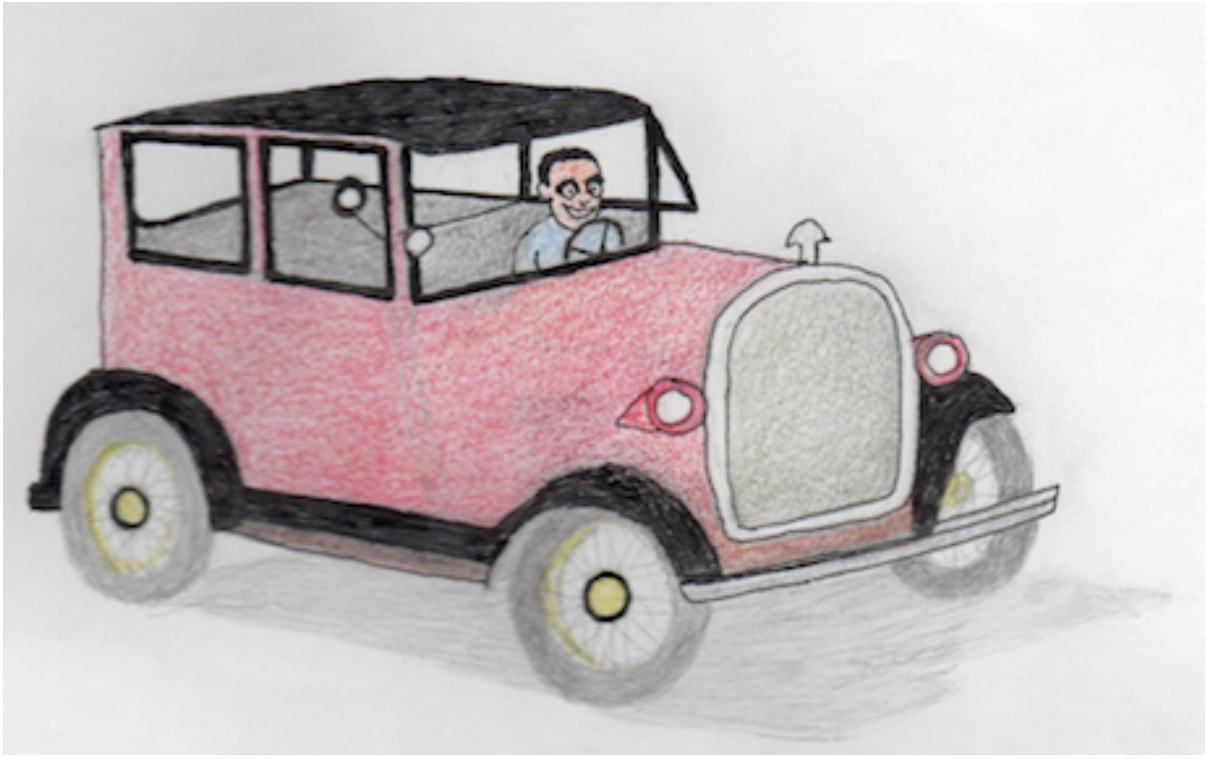
Ironically, the idea of the game was stolen by an acquaintance named Charles Darrow, who changed the name to *Monopoly* and sold the rights to Parker Brothers, which began marketing the game in 1935.

Automobiles Replace Horses and Revolutionize Workforces

The period from the 1880s through WWI marked the development of the automobile, which grew out of the concepts of both trains and bicycles. The earliest prototypes of cars were either on a rail or made from two bicycles. Electric trolley cars on rail became common in

cities across America in the 1890s, but the idea of each individual driving their own car didn't catch on until the roaring twenties. Until that period, horse-drawn carriages were still common on city streets. In the meantime, William McKinley was the first US president to ride in an automobile, in 1899.

"8 Surprising Facts About William McKinley"
By David Kindy, History.com, January 29, 2025
https://www.history.com/news/william-mckinley-surprising-facts



Henry Ford is credited as the developer who made automobiles affordable for the masses. His Ford Motor Company based in Detroit, inspired by the meat-packing

industry, popularized the concept of the assembly line starting in 1913. Factory workers specialized in specific tasks involving design or installation of auto parts. Ford's Model T was the first mass-produced car from this specialized type of assembly line process that set new automotive industry standards and influenced other industries. The production of automobiles required automakers to purchase materials such as steel, glass, rubber and fuel. Ford figured out a balance between cost efficiency and consumer empowerment.

Another one of Henry Ford's innovations that changed America was the 5-day/40-hour work week. The idea had been around for decades as many people thought it was fair to divide the day into three eight-hour segments for labor, recreation and relaxation. Prior to the 1920s, it was common for employees of various trades to work up to 80 hours per week.

President Wilson signed the Adamson Act of 1916 to settle a threatened railroad strike among 400,000 workers who demanded an 8-hour work day. But the idea didn't spread to other industries as a standard until Ford initiated a 40-hour week in 1922 then made it an official practice four years later. It was part of "Fordism," an economic philosophy that viewed mass production as requiring mass consumption. Ford wanted employees to enjoy their work and home life and get paid enough money to purchase vehicles from him.

"The Origins of the Five-Day Work Week in America"
By Dave Roos, History.com, August 26, 2024
https://www.history.com/news/five-day-work-week-labor-movement

Ford Offers an Affordable Car

The cost of the lowest-priced Model T (the Runabout edition) in 1925 was $260 while the Sedan model represented the high end at $660. Model T Runabouts from 1910 were about $900, so prices came down significantly with the efficiency of assembly line production. These values a century later would be 17 times more. Ford paid workers $5 per 8-hour day, which amounted to $25 per week. Back then gas cost 22 cents per gallon.

"Inflation Adjusted Gasoline Prices"
By Tim McMahon, InflationData.com, June 2, 2022
https://inflationdata.com/articles/inflation-adjusted-prices/inflation-adjusted-gasoline-prices/

"Ford Model T Original Prices"
FordModelT.net
https://www.fordmodelt.net/model-t-ford-prices.htm

Throughout the twenties, thousands of miles of roads and highways were paved across America, preparing the public for the transition to car culture. This development led to a variety of new businesses that could profit off the automobile, such as gas stations and auto repair shops. Highway development also inspired entrepreneurs to build tourist attractions, hotels, restaurants and stores to interest travelers. Soon billboards appeared on highways as a form of advertising. As cars overtook horses, it meant

the disappearance of horse waste in streets, leading to more sanitary conditions as bacteria-spreading diseases began to decrease.

TIMELINE OF EARLY AUTOMOBILES

1886	Karl Benz patents first gasoline-powered car made from bicycles
1897	Ransom Olds launches Olds Motor Vehicle Company (later Oldsmobile)
1901	Horace and John Dodge sign contract to produce cars for Olds
1901	David Buick launches the Buick auto brand in Detroit
1902	Carriage maker Studebaker introduces its first car
1902	Oldsmobile introduces the first mass-produced car
1902	Ford launches Cadillac Motor Company
1903	Oldsmobile leads the nation in car sales
1903	Ford launches Ford Motor Company with investments from the Dodge brothers
1908	William Durant from Buick launches General Motors, which acquires Oldsmobile and Buick
1908	Ford begins mass production on the Model T
1911	Durant leaves GM to form Chevrolet with Louis and Arthur Chevrolet
1913	Ford introduces the assembly line
1918	GM merges with Chevrolet
1919	GM begins outselling Ford as the top U.S. automaker
1925	Walter Chrysler reorganizes Maxwell Motor Company as Chrysler Corporation
1928	Chrysler acquires Dodge brand
1929	Ford signs contract with Soviet Union to build factory for selling autos and parts

Prohibition Wins Thru Vetoes

Aside from oil, various forms of energy generation existed between depressions. Alcohol could be used to power cars, but Rockefeller didn't want that. He wanted the status quo to be oil, in which the derivatives of petroleum and diesel were the main fuels used to power cars.

In Congress, the alcohol prohibition movement was led by House member Andrew Volstead (R-MN), who orchestrated passage of the National Prohibition Act, also known as the Volstead Act. It was vetoed by President

Wilson then Congress overrode his veto.

Since many popular breweries had German names, it was easy for prohibition advocates to link beer with Germany, which was considered an enemy of the United States during WWI.
Starting in 1918 state legislatures began to vote on prohibition, led by several southern states. By January 1919 the required three-fourths of states ratified the amendment.

"Prohibition: United States History 1920-1933"
Britannica.com
https://www.britannica.com/event/Prohibition-United-States-history-1920-1933

Forty-six states ratified the amendment while the only two to reject it were Rhode Island and Connecticut. The impact of the new law was a sharp decline in alcohol consumption while beer and wine companies had to diversify into selling other products. Anheuser Busch, for example, started selling ice cream while Coors sold malted milk to Hershey. Prohibition was overturned in 1933 with the 21st Amendment. Kansas and Tennessee remained "dry" states, meaning it was up to counties to determine how alcohol was regulated.

"When Each State Went Sober: Mapping Prohibition Ratification by State"
By Katie Brown, Vinepair, January 12, 2021
https://vinepair.com/articles/prohibition-ratification-state-map/

The main consequence of prohibition while it was in effect was the rise of organized crime. Bootleggers sold booze

illegally while speakeasies were establishments that secretly served alcohol to customers, often in a basement or other hidden area. As gangs rose in cities across America to facilitate the illegal distribution and sale of alcohol, they also profited from gambling, prostitution and drug trafficking in their black market business models. Joe Masseria headed a gang in New York City that included mobsters Frank Costello, Meyer Lansky, Bugsy Siegel and Lucky Luciano. Al Capone became a notorious crime boss in Chicago.

"Prohibition: United States History 1920-1933"
Britannica.com
https://www.britannica.com/event/Prohibition-United-States-history-1920-1933

Why Prohibition Didn't Work

The ban against alcohol sales that was ratified in 1919 and began in January 1920 with the 18th Amendment only lasted 14 years because it wasn't popular with the public and it fostered an underworld of organized criminals. While it was illegal to manufacture, transport or sell alcohol, it was still legal to consume it.

The push behind the amendment came from elites such as Henry Ford and Thomas Edison, who believed alcohol weakened workforces. Ford also had a deal with Rockefeller to make gas-powered cars instead of alcohol-powered cars. The "temperance movement" that pushed the amendment actually began in the 1830s with a

religious revival, but it took decades of debate for Congress to take action. Sometimes time tunnels move in slow motion.

"The Roaring 20s on Film: A New Rule of America's Powerful Families"
YouTube channel: Perspective, uploaded January 9, 2024
https://youtu.be/M9hhIc65yYM?si=UhN0-R4UVjmMd1kw

Gas-Powered Cars Become the Norm

As the 1920s unfolded, the gas-powered car steadily gained momentum in the marketplace. Although Henry Ford insisted the Model A did not need to be updated, rival General Motors introduced a new idea that revolutionized the automotive industry and forced new vehicles on the market each year. GM president Alfred Sloan offered different models to different consumer segments, rather than adhering to Ford's one-size-fits-all philosophy. The company employed designer Harley Earle, who introduced the concept of stylized vehicles beyond utility.

It was this idea - that cars can become outdated due to fashion rather than utility - that helped increase sales exponentially for the automotive industry. A home was typically the biggest ticket-item for a consumer, followed by a car. Even a renter could typically afford buying a used car, preserving its economic viability, while still being dependent on oil and gas. The combination of new annual car designs linked to status with strategies of built-in obsolescence helped make the automotive industry one of the leading industries in America for recurring revenue.

Oil Control Defines War Victors

It wasn't obvious yet in WWI, but by the climax of WWII it was crystal clear that a nation's control of its oil supply was detrimental to national defense. Germany and Japan were dependent on oil from outside sources. The Nazis had actually made a deal with the Soviets in 1940 to supply them with oil, even after Hitler started WWII the previous year. Without a large oil supply, a nation was doomed to run out of energy and lose territory to opponents with better resources.

The Soviet-Germany oil deal fell apart when Hitler invaded the USSR in 1941 with nearly 4 million troops. Germany had no access to overseas oil and instead relied on oil from Romania and synthetic oil made from coal via the German conglomerate IG Farben. From 1941 through 1943 Hitler tried to seize Russian oil fields near Baku but was unsuccessful.

By 1944 both Germany and Japan were running out of oil, whereas the Allies had endless reserves in places like the United States, Canada and the Gulf of Mexico. At the time the US was a dominant oil supplier to about half of the world.

Russia had actually beaten the United States in the discovery of oil, building its first oil factory in 1837. Oil drilling began in the decade that followed. By the 1870s Russian investors ventured deeper into oil exploration on a much larger scale, with a vast wealth of oil found in Baku. Had Hitler captured Baku, it would've been a sufficient supply to keep the German military powerful.

But the Soviets prevailed in pushing the Nazis away from Baku and out of the USSR. Otherwise, the main source of oil for Germany was Romania, which started out neutral in WWII. Then fascists persuaded the government to align with Nazi Germany in 1940. The United States had cut off oil to Japan in August 1941, four months prior to Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. The move was meant to discourage Japan from its imperialistic goals of occupying China. From 1942 to 1945 US submarines targeted Japanese oil tankers with heavy firepower, leading to depleted oil resources for Japan.

"How Oil Defeated the Nazis"
OilPrice.com, by Gregory Brew, June 5, 2019
https://oilprice.com/Energy/Crude-Oil/How-Oil-Defeated-The-Nazis.html

Just as oil shortages decided WWII, inability of the Americans to stop North Vietnam from building a petroleum pipeline in the sixties would be a major reason the US lost the Vietnam War. By 1968 US military officials had photographed the pipeline along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos.

For three years American military forces tried to dismantle the pipeline through bombing, but the North Vietnamese were still able to expand it to the Chinese border. Communist fighters were able to misdirect US forces by moving damaged pipeline to areas far from the actual pipeline, which was buried under jungles and river beds. It started in 1969 as a 75-mile pipeline, but by the end of the war in 1975 it had been expanded to over 3,000 miles.

"Why MACV-SOG Never Found the Pipeline that Fueled North Vietnam's Victory"
Dawson's War, July 1, 2026
https://youtu.be/4fpy02C3LX4?si=aT--fr6X9huX-GkS

Beginning of the US-Saudi Oil Alliance

The US began its diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia in the early thirties. As a nation, Saudi Arabia was founded in 1932 by King Ibn Saud. His family had held power for the previous 130 years as the nation faced a series of name changes. Starting in the forties, the US has provided Saudi Arabia with military protection in return for access to a large oil supply.

During the roaring twenties, Standard Oil of California and other oil giants began looking for new sources of oil around the world. The company made a bid for oil exploration within Saudi Arabia but in 1936 sold half of its stake to the oil company eventually known as Texaco. This exploration firm then gained its own separate identity in 1944 as Aramco, which attracted big investments from

other oil companies. It eventually was acquired by the Saudi government as a state-owned business and became one of the biggest oil companies in the world.

Rockefeller Influence on Government and Business

The Rockefeller family played large roles in both world wars and profited off them immensely. Considering their huge investments and leadership in oil, steel, banking, medicine and media, they were further involved in multiple lucrative defense contracts. David Rockefeller served as a captain for military intelligence in North Africa and France while working with family members at Standard Oil. Then he went to work for Chase National Bank, where his uncle Winthrop Aldrich was chairman. David became president in 1960 after the name changed to Chase Manhattan Bank (now JPMorgan Chase).

Through this banking giant, Rockefeller was acquainted with two CIA agents named Archibald Roosevelt Jr. and Kermit Roosevelt Jr., both grandsons of Theodore Roosevelt. Both were sons of financial executives. Archie became a member of the John Birch Society. Kermit was a member of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), which transformed into the CIA. Then he helped form a pro-Arab propaganda organization that was funded by the CIA. Kermit also played a role in Operation Ajax, the plan to overthrow the government of Iran in 1953.

After working in the Department of Health, Education and

Welfare, David's brother Nelson Rockefeller was appointed as Eisenhower's Special Assistant to the President in 1954. His main job was to attend meetings with the cabinet, CFR and National Security Council. Nelson became the governor of New York five years later.

"Letter to Nelson A. Rockefeller Appointing Him Special Assistant to the President"
By Dwight D. Eisenhower, The American Presidency Project, December 15, 1954
https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/letter-nelson-rockefeller-appointing-him-special-assistant-the-president

In 1968 following the RFK assassination, it was up to Nelson, the republican governor, to replace the fallen democratic US senator from New York. Nelson offered the seat to his brother David, who declined. Nelson then offered the seat to his nephew Jay Rockefeller, a democrat, who also declined. He then chose republican Charles Goodell, who accepted the nomination and was confirmed.

Presidents and Rockefellers

David Rockefeller met with multiple US presidents starting with Eisenhower, as well as foreign leaders such as Khrushchev and Castro. He would often serve as an unofficial American diplomat on his world travels. Others close to him included Eisenhower's Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and his brother CIA Director Allen Dulles. That made Rockefeller influential to US foreign policy, as he was Director of the Council on Foreign Relations starting in 1949 then Chairman in 1970. David

was a member of the elite business and foreign affairs think tank the Bilderberg Group, then formed the similar think tank called the Trilateral Commission in 1973, while remaining Chairman of Chase Manhattan Bank.

Just a year later his brother Nelson became Vice President of the United States, appointed by President Ford. President Carter offered David the position of Treasury Secretary, but he declined. David, a republican, never seemed interested in a high-ranking political position, but positioned himself to be influential to the highest-ranking politicians of both parties.

Both David and Nelson Rockefeller were instrumental in the development of the World Trade Center in Manhattan, along with family members John D., Jr. and Winthrop. It was David who came up with the idea to build the skyscrapers and to have them overseen by the Port Authority of New York. John D., Jr., father of David and Nelson, donated over $8 million to the United Nations to purchase land for the project while Nelson as governor helped approve the plan. Construction of the world's tallest buildings known as the Twin Towers began in 1968 and was mostly completed by 1973.

"World Trade Center (1942-2002)"
PBS.org
https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/newyork-world-trade-center-1942-2002/

ROCKEFELLER FAMILY TIMELINE

1859	John D. Rockefeller (JDR) begins a series of business partnerships
1863	Rockefeller partners build oil refinery in Cleveland
1870	JDR founds Standard Oil
1879	NY court finds Standard Oil has monopolistic business practices
1897	JDR Jr takes over as president of Standard Oil
1900	Standard Oil controls 90% of U.S. oil market
1901	Daughter of U.S. Senator Nelson Aldrich, Abigail, marries JDR Jr
1901	Rockefeller Institute of Medicine formed
1901	JDR and JDR Jr join U.S. Steel Board of Directors
1902	JDR forms General Education Board, which awards grants thru 1964
1904	Ida Tarbell publishes unflattering book *The History of the Standard Oil Company*
1910	Flexner Report leads to Rockefeller funding medical schools
1911	US Supreme Court rules Standard Oil to be a monopoly & must break into 34 firms
1913	Rockefeller Foundation established as JDR's wealth is estimated to be $900 million
1926	Rockefeller Foundation funds Eugenics research in Germany
1933	Rockefeller Center opens in Manhattan, housing RCA building
1937	JDR dies at 98
1938	Rockefeller Foundation funds radio research on effects of "War of the Worlds" show
1944	Nelson Rockefeller serves as State Department assistant under FDR
1949	David Rockefeller becomes Director of the Council on Foreign Relations
1953	Nelson Rockefeller serves as Under Secretary of Health, Education & Welfare
1959	Nelson Rockefeller becomes NY governor thru 1973
1960	David Rockefeller promoted to president of Chase Manhattan Bank, JDR Jr Dies at 86
1964	Nelson Rockefeller runs for republican presidential nomination, losing to Goldwater
1965	Rockefeller Institute of Medicine changes name to Rockefeller University
1967	Winthrop Rockefeller becomes republican governor of Arkansas for 4 years
1968	Nelson Rockefeller runs for republican presidential nomination, losing to Nixon
1973	David Rockefeller forms the Trilateral Commission
1974	Nelson Rockefeller appointed US VP by Ford
1977	Jay Rockefeller becomes democratic governor of West Virginia for 8 years
1979	Nelson Rockefeller dies at 70
1985	Jay Rockefeller becomes US Senator (D-WV) for 30 years
1996	Win Rockefeller, son of Winthrop, becomes Arkansas Lt. Governor for 10 years
2016	Rockefeller family divests from fossil fuel, criticizing ExxonMobil's environmental record
2017	David Rockefeller dies at 101

Plastic Culture Spreads

As much as vinyl records were the platform for revolutionary musical voices, they still came from the establishment's main resource - oil. Vinyl is a plastic

petrochemical derivative of crude oil. Big record labels such as EMI, Columbia, Warner Brothers, RCA, MGM and Decca, as well as countless indie labels, relied on oil to make albums and singles for their audiences.

The cost of making 500 copies of a long-playing (LP) record in the sixties was under $1000. While the plastic cost about .30 to .60 to manufacture the disc, indie artists would pay up to $2 per unit, allowing them to sell for a profit. During the sixties, major label albums cost $4-5 at record stores. Since records were fairly inexpensive to make then, a multitude of new garage bands emerged from seeing The Beatles on TV and hearing their music on radio.

If an indie label could sell several thousand singles or albums for a profit, it could attract attention from bigger labels to buy out artist contracts. That's what happened with the band The Association, which was picked up by Warner Bros in 1966 after having indie success with "Along Comes Mary." Unlike the ultra-corporate period of the early 21st century, pop charts in the sixties were flooded with indie labels. But the expensive production of major label albums such as *Pet Sounds* by the Beach Boys and *Sgt. Pepper* by The Beatles substantially raised the bar on recording costs by the late sixties.

The garage band business model of quickly recording "Louie Louie" by The Kingsmen for $50 became overshadowed by psychedelic and progressive rock

masterpieces that were too expensive for the common local musician to make. By the late sixties, garage bands were drowned out by elaborate arrangements and productions, such as *Abbey Road* by The Beatles.

JFK's Slippery Relations with Big Oil

The list of largest Fortune 500 corporations by revenue throughout the sixties included oil giants such as Exxon, Mobil, Texaco and Gulf Oil. Automakers General Motors, Ford Motor and Chrysler, which relied on oil, were also frequently among the top ten. Multinational conglomerate and US weapons contractor General Electric, which manufactured jet engines, was also high on the list.

"The Biggest Companies in the US by Revenue Each Year Since 1955"
LLC Attorney, Fortune 500 List
https://llcattorney.com/small-business-blog/biggest-companies-by-year

Kennedy became unpopular with oil companies in 1963 when he proposed getting rid of the "oil depletion allowance," which was a major tax write-off for the industry that was established in the 1920s. It allowed oil companies to shield 27.5 percent of their revenue from taxation. Doing away with this tax loophole would cost oil giants hundreds of millions of dollars they didn't want to see disappear.

President John F. Kennedy

"Inside the Dallas Petroleum Club"
By Glenda Vosburgh, D Magazine, September 19, 2014
https://www.dmagazine.com/publications/d-ceo/2014/october/inside-the-dallas-petroleum-club/

LBJ's Texas Oil Friends

Construction of Dealey Plaza in Dallas was completed in 1934 as part of FDR's Works Progress Administration (WPA). FDR rode through Dealey Plaza in 1936. The Texas School Book Depository at the corner of Houston Street and Elm Street was built in 1902. By the 1930s it was owned by Texas oilman David Harold Byrd, a close friend of Lyndon Johnson.

Byrd was a member of the private Dallas Petroleum Club,

along with fellow members George H.W. Bush, H.L. Hunt, Clint Murchison and CIA man David Atlee Phillips. His cousin, US Senator Harry F. Byrd (D-VA), an ex-newspaper publisher, was a conservative democrat who gained 15 electoral votes in the 1960 presidential election without running.

President Lyndon B. Johnson

Byrd Oil Corporation eventually sold to Mobil Oil. D.H. Byrd owned other companies as well and was a co-founder of Temco Aircraft, which merged into Ling-Temco-Vought (LTV), in which he became a big investor. With the help of LBJ, this company secured a large defense contract with the US Navy in February 1964 to deliver A-7 Corsair II fighter planes, which were used in the Vietnam

War.

"David Harold Byrd"
By John Simkin, Spatacus-Educational.com, September 1997
https://spartacus-educational.com/MDbyrdDH.htm

LBJ had a particularly special relationship with a construction firm called Brown & Root. He secured huge government contracts for the company that previously didn't have experience in large-scale construction. As a congress member under FDR, Johnson was able to secure multi-million dollar contracts for the company. It allowed the firm to diversify into various types of large construction, such as developing one of the first offshore oil platforms in 1947.

Brown & Root in return made huge donations to LBJ's campaigns, allowing him to advance from the House to the Senate. The firm was acquired by Halliburton in 1962 and went on to enjoy massive military contracts during the Vietnam War (thanks to LBJ) and subsequent military action. Halliburton began rebuilding oil sites in Iraq following the Gulf War under Bush in the 1990s.

Bush had been the only republican to attend LBJ's presidential farewell at Andrews Air Force Base in 1969. LBJ served with George's father Prescott in the Senate from 1952 to 1961. They served together on the Senate Arms Committee. Bush supported LBJ's positions on the Civil Rights Act of 1968 and the Vietnam War.

Suspicion rose when presidential son George W. Bush picked Dick Cheney as his running mate for the 2000 election. Cheney served as Halliburton's CEO from 1995 to 2000. The new Bush Administration threw another war in the middle east and allowed Halliburton to score more huge military contracts.

"The Nation: Friends in Deed; In the Company of Vice Presidents, A Big Texas Contractor Prospered"
The New York Times, by Richard A. Oppel Jr., March 30, 2003
https://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/30/weekinreview/nation-friends-deed-company-vice-presidents-big-texas-contractor-prospered.html

Oil Mixed with News and Entertainment

Mainstream media was heavily funded by big oil advertising thoughout the 20th century. Like a giant octopus, large corporations became interconnected with each other through oil. Even though oil companies generally stayed away from radio advertising in the 1920s, radio proved to be a resilient and profitable industry after the 1929 market crash and throughout the great depression. Oil companies then began to spend millions of dollars on radio advertising throughout the depression years and helped radio become a leading national industry.

Government and big oil became close partners, especially during wartime. *Texaco Star Theatre* was one of the earliest TV shows at a time when it was normal for sponsors to be included in the name of a show. It was the

show that made Milton Berle a famous comedian.

Oil became embedded in news and various forms of pop culture from the petrochemicals in the ink printed in newspapers and magazines to the vinyl in music collections of singles and albums to the film at movie theaters. Some of the earliest Hollywood films were set in oil fields. It was simply the unavoidable backdrop of the Los Angeles scenery before it became densely populated. Early Hollwood stars invested in oil as a method of building wealth. Over a century, the oil industry has produced about 300,000 of its own US films that can be categorized as training films and free documentaries for schools about petroleum.

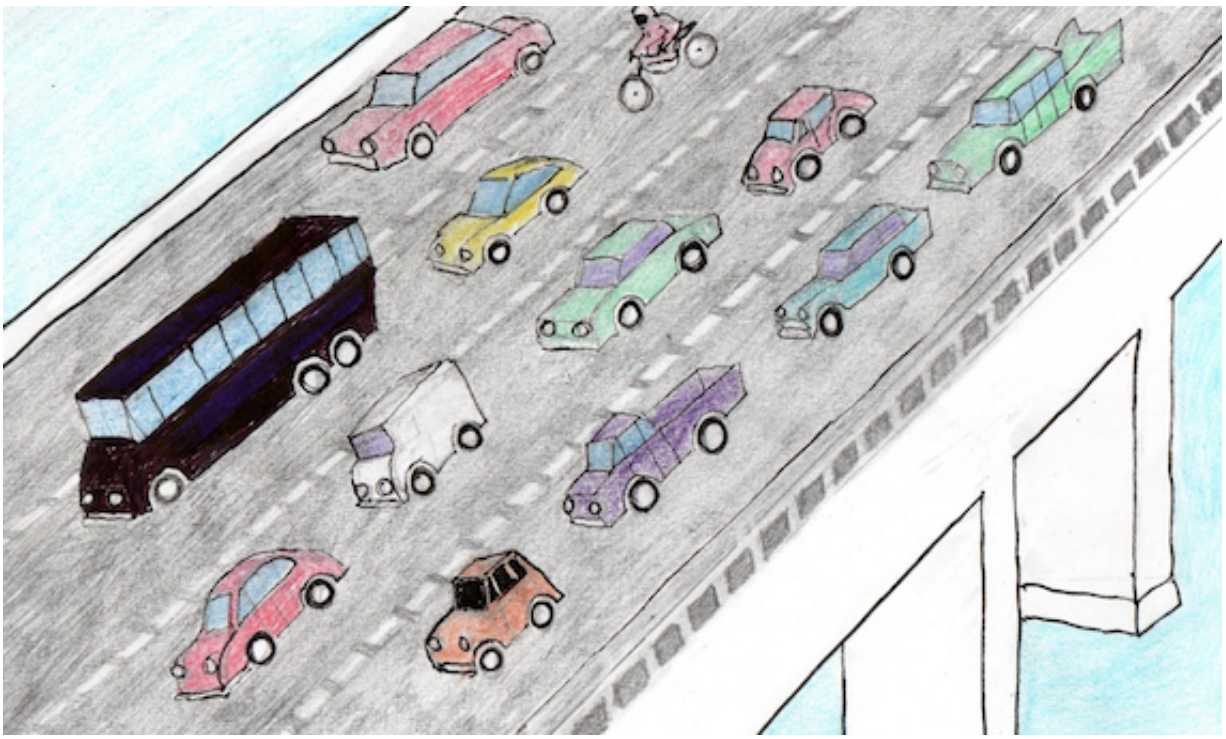
"Hollywood Has Always Gushed About Fossil Fuels"
The Hollywood Reporter, by Degen Penner, April 22, 2025
https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/business/business-news/hollywoods-cinema-extractions-fossil-fuels-oil-1236194213/

"New book: How oil influenced the film industry"
EurekAlert! February 21, 2021
https://www.eurekalert.org/news-releases/866141

The Interstate Highway Act of 1956 signed by Eisenhower was not only the key that connected the Pacific and Atlantic coasts for car and truck drivers, it led to the formation of suburban neighborhoods that featured large department stores like Sears and Macy's at shopping malls. Many workers in cities chose to live on the outskirts of town in suburban areas that required a commute to

work, sometimes up to a half hour. The term "mall" was first used in the late fifties to describe a large shopping center with multiple stores, typically anchored by a well known brand like Sears. Most major cities or their outlying areas had shopping malls at the start of the sixties.

"The Great American Shopping Mall: Past, Present and Future"
Cornell School of Law, by Marcela Kunova, October 21, 2021
https://publications.lawschool.cornell.edu/jlpp/2021/10/12/the-great-american-shopping-mall-past-present-and-future/



By the 21st century big oil has continued to be the status quo foundation of modern pop culture with the help of big media. Popular publications such as *The New York Times* and *Reuters* earned millions of dollars from oil giants such as Saudi Aramco in the early 2020s through advertising.

These media outlets have a vested interest to keep oil the status quo, no matter what happens with climate change, huge oil spill disasters or war that requires enormous oil resources while driving up the cost of living.

"New book: How oil influenced the film industry"
Journalism.co.uk, by Marcela Kunova, February 15, 2026
https://www.journalism.co.uk/from-reuters-to-the-new-york-times-big-oil-pays-most-trusted-media-brands-to-push-greenwashing/

Buried in the history of 20th century oil is the explanation of how the world became interconnected with the petro dollar. Usually once a crisis goes away, most people tend to forget about it, such as the Arab Oil Embargo of 1973. Not only did it cause a recession, it set the tone for how the petro dollar would create a world of inflation. Prices of 1973 rose to several times higher 50 years later. At one time inflation didn't really exist in America, but eventually it made a huge impact on people's lives in the 21st century. Understanding the history of inflation helps clarify today's financial state we find ourselves in.

Fighting Over Plastic

The hypnotic effects of the counter-culture spread to the mainstream by the late sixties, particularly through music. The Beatles, whether accidentally or intentionally, mixed controversy with music, which at that time was dependent on being signed to a record label with the financial power to distribute millions of pieces of plastic to loyal fans. The

album cover of *Yesterday and Today* featuring the four musicians laughing with destroyed baby dolls was too shocking for record store managers, so 750,000 copies had to be recalled by Capitol Records.

The album was only released in North America because it was a compilation of songs taken from UK albums, which had more tracks than US albums. Essentially, the label was selling an extra album to US fans, but this time it lost money due to the recall. In fact, it was the first Beatles album to initially lose money, although later it would become profitable. The cover idea was meant to be "pop art" but was "misinterpreted" by the public, according to Capitol Records president Alan Livingston, explaining why he ordered the cover to be replaced. The band's manager Brian Epstein described the cover as the band wanting to portray themselves as human compared with plastic dolls.

"Beatles Butcher Block Cover"
PrintMag.com, January 29, 2011
https://www.printmag.com/daily-heller/beatles-butcher-cover/

The idea that recorded sound on plastic could create so much controversy underscores how powerful oil - the source of plastic - inevitably became to pop culture. Records were among the cheapest form of entertainment available, so it was common for the average consumer to build a sizeable record collection in a short time. This collection formed the blueprint of the individual's identity, identifying the music most reflective of personal thinking and feeling.

Message songs protesting war existed in WWI. The folk group The Weavers were blacklisted by Senator McCarthy in the fifties because he linked them to communism. The Beatles began speaking out against conflict in 1966, the year they topped the charts with "We Can Work It Out." As newsmakers, they played into various historic events, such as the civil rights movement, the use of LSD, the peace movement and venturing into experimental music.

John Lennon's misunderstood comment the band was "bigger than Jesus" triggered Beatle record-burning stories in the religious deep south. Yet *Yesterday and Today* and *Revolver* were still #1 albums in the summer of 1966, so

the controversy probably helped more than hurt the band's popularity. Ultimately, an original "butcher block cover" became a collector's item selling for thousands of dollars.

Clearly, the plastic medium was a reflection of pop culture, but could it impact government in a way to change the status quo? The answer was yes because the song "Taxman," from the *Revolver* LP called out both political parties in the UK to view the high tax rate (40-95%) as too absurdly extreme, especially for a band that was already getting ripped off by its publisher. The song "Got to Get You Into My Life" was a secret upbeat plug for cannabis, which became decriminalized in the 21st century.

"Tomorrow Never Knows" introduced backward sounds to music, which inspired all kinds of new studio tricks. Songs by The Beatles had a way of raising people's ambition to do things the establishment said couldn't be done.

Other recordings on vinyl that raised public awareness about social issues included "Revolution" by The Beatles, "In The Ghetto" by Elvis Presley, "War" by Edwin Starr, "Teach Your Children" by Crosby, Stills and Nash and "Imagine" by John Lennon. It's still debatable, but these songs had such a huge impact on social consciousness that they may have contributed to the end of the Vietnam War. President Ford officially ended the war in April 1975, five months after meeting with ex-Beatle George Harrison at the White House.

As further proof that oil products could change history, it was magnetic tape made of petroleum that exposed Nixon, forcing him to resign. Tape was made of two layers, both from petrochemicals: a base film as a substrate/ platform and a coating that contained sound derived from magnetic particles. The "smoking gun" tape revealing Nixon's decision to pay conspirators caused immediate shockwaves in both houses of Congress and mainstream media, as Barry Goldwater, along with RNC leader George H.W. Bush, were among the last high-ranking political officials standing by his side. Due to losing most of his support in Congress, Nixon saw the "writing on the wall" that impeachment would be the next step. Film and ink made of petroleum documented Nixon's downfall in movies and books such as *All The President's Men*.

"Kodachrome" by Paul Simon was a 1973 hit that mentioned "I can read the writing on the wall." The song captured the spirit of how colorful photos preserve memories more vividly than the "crap" the singer learned in high school. Kodachrome film was also a petroleum product. The song has a pleasant melody and almost sounds like a commercial for Kodak and camera maker Nikon, but neither brand publicly responded to the song's content. Camera parts (body shells, panels, lenses, buttons, etc) have relied on high-grade engineering petroleum-based plastics.

Starting in the early sixties the term "plastic" became a metaphor in the counter-culture for things that were fake.

The awareness of growing landfills and waterways full of plastic waste helped escalate the environmental movement, but not enough to make people back off listening to records or watching movies.

Oil products made people sing and dance as well as think and feel in the 20th century. It fueled the spirit of both the establishment and the counter-culture. Despite the energy crisis and recession of 1973, music was something that kept on selling and even played a big part in the transition from the hippie movement to a more commercialized (yuppie, hip hop, metal, punk and new wave) culture. The shrinking of vinyl albums to CDs not only created enormous savings for record labels, it marked a cultural revelation in perception about music - that it was part of changing technology and that plastic was now a matter of

environmental concern.

© 2026 by Alex Cosper