

Syllabus: American Business History: History 363 Winter 2015

Instructor: Daniel Pope: 366 McKenzie Hall, 346-4015, dapope@uoregon.edu

Class meets Tuesdays and Thursdays, 14:00-15:20 in 229 McKenzie.

Office Hours: Tuesdays 10-12 and Thursdays 3:30-5:00

GTF: Mi Zhao, zhao2@uoregon.edu, 350F McKenzie, office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 3:30-4:30

President Calvin Coolidge once said that the "chief business of the American people is business." That doesn't necessarily mean that the history of the American people *is* the history of American business, but it does say that we will be examining topics that are central to the American past. Also, since the modern business corporation is certainly a dominant institution in our lives, a historical perspective on it should be useful for those who want to understand contemporary American society.

This is a one-term course, designed for students in History, Business and other departments and programs who want to get some historical perspective on American business. No prior classes in either History or Business are assumed or required here, but such courses might prove relevant if you've taken them.

Books: I've ordered the following books at the UO Bookstore. Used copies may be available there or elsewhere.

REQUIRED:

Glenn Porter, *The Rise of Big Business 1860-1920*. (I've ordered the third edition, published 2006. If you can save a significant amount of money by getting the second edition, published 1992, that's OK. The first edition, published back in 1973, is ancient history by now and should not be used.)

Frederick W. Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management*. (This is also available online through Google Books, [here](#), and another version [here](#).)

Michael Lewis, *The Big Short*

OPTIONAL: Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt*. (This novel about an American businessman in the 1920s is for one of the short paper options. Look at the forthcoming description of the paper topic options before you decide whether to buy it.)

Requirements:

1. Participation in Blackboard discussion board: This will require posting responses to three Discussion Forum prompts on Blackboard. To find the prompt and respond, go to the “Discussion Board” item on the “Tools” menu in the left hand column of the course page. The first prompt will be available for posting from 8:00 a.m. Monday, Jan. 5 through the end of the day on Thursday, Jan. 15. About ten percent of your course grade.
2. Midterm exam: Thursday, Feb. 5. About 25% of course grade, one essay and five brief IDs. More information to follow.
3. Short paper (about 4-6 pages) due at class time Thursday, March 5. About 25% of course grade. Instructions on the paper coming soon.
4. Final exam: Mon., March 16, 12:30-2:30. About 40% of course grade. The final exam will be comprehensive, covering the entire term’s material, but it will emphasize the second half of the term. Format to be announced. I also intend to provide a take-home alternative to the in-class final.

I hate to mention it, but plagiarism and other forms of cheating are serious academic offenses. If I discover examples of academic dishonesty I intend to have them punished severely. If you have a question about whether something is acceptable, please consult with me or Mi Zhao, our GTF.

Class Sessions:

Note: This course will feature biographical lectures and videos--a “Tycoon of the Week” designed to introduce you to some of the most interesting figures in American business history and to raise the question of how much impact individuals have had on the course of historical change.

Jan. 6: Introduction and Tycoon #1: Robert Keayne

By this date, please read [some brief excerpts](#) (about four pages) about the controversy involving our first “Tycoon of the Week.”

Jan. 8: Colonial Merchants and an (almost) Global Economy

By this date, read Benjamin Franklin, ["The Way to Wealth"](#) (1757). Also, watch Part 1 and Part 3 of a video series on the business of the slave trade in Rhode Island: <http://www.providencejournal.com/extra/2006/slavery/>. (Total about 13 minutes). The other parts of the series are recommended but optional.

Jan. 13: Independence and the Constitution and Tycoon #2: John Jacob Astor

By this date, read James Madison, [Federalist Paper 10](#). (1787)

Jan. 15: A Constitutional and Legal Infrastructure for Business Growth

By this date, read two excerpts from Alexander Hamilton, “Report on Manufactures,” 1791. [Excerpt One](#) [Excerpt Two](#)

Jan. 20: The Legal “Release of Energy,” Pre-Civil War Growth, and the Transportation Revolution

By this date, read the summaries of [majority](#) and [dissenting](#) opinions in the Supreme Court case *Charles River Bridge v. Warren Bridge* (1837)

Jan. 22: Tycoon #3: a video on P.T. Barnum

By this date, read Barnum, “Rules for Success,” posted on Blackboard.

Jan. 27: America’s First “Big Business”: The Railroads? Or Slavery?

By this date, on slavery, read James H. Hammond, “Cotton Is King” and Drew Gilpin Faust, “James Henry Hammond and the Plantation as a Business Enterprise” (both posted on Blackboard); on railroads, read [“The Railroads: The First Big Business”](#) and [“J. Edgar Thomson: Master of the Pennsylvania Railroad”](#)

Jan. 29: Mass Production and Mass Distribution

By this date, read Porter, *The Rise of Big Business*, chapters 1 and 2. Also, browse the online [Sears, Roebuck catalogue of 1897](#)

Feb. 3: Manufacturing: Mass Production and Mass Distribution (continued) and Tycoon #4: Andrew Carnegie

By this date, read Andrew Carnegie’s 1889 essay, [“Wealth.”](#)

Feb. 5: MIDTERM EXAM

By the midterm, read Porter, *The Rise of Big Business*, chapter 3 (Bibliographical essay is not required).

Feb. 10: Finance and Control of Big Business and Tycoon #5: J. Pierpont Morgan

By this date, start reading Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (an online version [here](#)).

Feb. 12: Frederick W. Taylor and Scientific Management (You can think of Taylor as a bonus tycoon.)

By this date, finish Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (an online version [here](#)); also read Thorstein Veblen, [“On the Nature and Uses of Sabotage”](#) (chapter one, pp.4-18, of Veblen, *The Engineers and the Price System*, 1921).

Feb. 17: Making a Consumer Society

By this date, read [brief excerpts](#) from Barton's 1924 bestseller, *The Man Nobody Knows*.

Feb. 19: Tycoon #6: Bruce Barton

Feb. 24: Shareholders and Stakeholders in Corporate America

By this date, read Milton Friedman, "[The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase Its Profits](#)" and John Kenneth Galbraith, "Countervailing Power". Galbraith reading is in the Blackboard documents section.

Feb. 26: Women and People of Color in American Business and Tycoon #7: Madame C.J. Walker

By this date, read the biographical sketch of Madame C.J. Walker at <http://www.biography.com/people/madam-cj-walker-9522174>. There are also some video clips on the site from a documentary I'll show in class.

March 3: A Trip to Wal-Mart

By this date, look at the PowerPoint posted [here](#). There will also be some brief readings on Wal-Mart, to be announced.

By this date, start reading Michael Lewis, *The Big Short*, prologue, chapters 1-4, 9, 10 and epilogue. (Chapters 5-8 are optional.)

March 5: The World of Finance and the Great Recession, Part I

Keep reading chapters in *The Big Short*.

March 10: Finance and the Great Recession, Part II and Tycoon #8: George Soros

By this date, finish Lewis, *The Big Short*, prologue, chapters 1-4, 9, 10 and epilogue. (Chapters 5-8 are optional.)

March 12: The Future of Capitalism--The Vision of Joseph Schumpeter, a Pessimistic Supporter

Final exam: Mon., March 16, 12:30-2:30.