American Business History, 1800- 1980

USA 270
Fall, 2011
M-W 3:30-4:45
Instructor, Michael Nash
Michael.nash@nyu.edu
212-998-2428

Overview:

This course traces the history of American Business from the early nineteenth through the late twentieth-century. Through reading and discussion we explore how United States business has changed over time from the small family firm and mercantile houses of the early 1800's through the joint stock companies and partnerships of the mid-nineteenth century, to the multi national corporations of the twentieth. The course will focus on the impact of technological change, the relationship between business culture and society, race, class, and gender, consumerism and the role of the worker. We will consider the changing ways that scholars and writers have viewed the American Business System, from the economists and sociologists who dominated early scholarship, to the generations of historians who emphasized the role of the entrepreneur and the organizational synthesis, through the more recent literature which focuses on flexible specialization, consumerism, women and African American business people. The central theme is the relationship between economic change, organizational capabilities, the firm, and its environment. Much of our discussion will explore the ways in which managerial decision making, technological choices, and relationships between capitalists, workers, government, and consumers have been shaped by culture and society.

Written Assignments and Grades:

This is a reading and discussion course that will include secondary literature and primary source documents. You are expected to master the assigned readings and come to class prepared to discuss them. I do not take attendance, but notice absentees. If you miss class repeatedly your grade will be affected. Class participation counts for 25% of your grade.

Written assignments include take home mid-term and take home final examinations. The mid-term (20% of the grade) will cover materials discussed in class during weeks 1 -7. The final (30%) will cover materials discussed during weeks (8-14). There will also be two short papers (1,000 words each) in which you will be asked to evaluate and contextualize historical documents relating to the American business experience. The first written assignment (10% of the grade) will be based on an article in a business trade journal. The second (15% of the grade) will focus on an archival document available on an archival repository's website.

Text books:

Reggie Blaszczyk and Philip Scranton, *Major Problems in American Business History: Documents and Essays* (cited as B & S)

Alfred Chandler, *Strategy and Structure: Chapters in the History of Industrial Enterprise*

Angel Kwolek-Folland, *Engendering Business: Men and Women in the Corporate Office, 1870-1930*

Walter Licht, *Industrializing America: The 19th century*

Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market*

Juliet Walker, *The History of Black Business in America*

Course Outline:

Week I Getting Started
Class 1 Introduction
Class 2 Law, Economics, and the State in the Antebellum Economy,
Licht, introduction, 1 -45

Week II Politics and Economics in Ante Bellum Century America
Class 1 Industrialization and the Entrepreneur in 19th Century America
B & S, chapter 5, Licht, 46- 78
Class 2 The Business of Slavery
B & S chapter 6

Week III The Civil War and its Aftermath
Class 1 Wartime Economy
Licht 46 – 103

Class 2 Post Bellum Business Enterprise
Licht, 103- 133

Week IV The Rise of Big Business

Class 1 The Railroad as the First Modern Corporation
Licht, 131-165; Chandler, 1 – 51

Class 1 Corporate Strategy and Business Structure: The DuPont Company
Chandler, 52-113

Week V The Multi Divisional Firm

Class 1 Creating General Motors
Chandler 114- 140

Class 2 Organization Building at General Motors
Chandler, 141- 161; B & S chapter 7

Week VI The New Inequality: Labor in the Age of Big Business

Class 1 Social Unrest and the Remaking of the U.S.
Licht, 166 – 196

Class 2 The Labor Movement and the Market
B & S, Chapter 9

Week VII Government Response

Class 1 Government and Labor
B & S, chapter 8

Class 2 Wilson, Roosevelt and the-Trusts
Mid-term examinations due

Week VIII The Great Depression and the Crisis of the Corporate Order

Class 1 The Crash
B& S, chapter 11

Class 2 The New Deal
Paper on article in business trade journal due

Week IX Manufacturing Diversity

Class 1 The Persistence of Small Business
Phillip Scranton, "Manufacturing Diversity: Production Systems, Markets, and American Consumer Society, 1870-1930," *Technology and Culture*, 35:3 (July 1994) 476-505

Class 2 Business, Culture, and Society
Kenneth Lipartito, "Culture and the Practice of Business History," *Business and Economic History*, 24:2 (Winter 1995) 1-41

Week X The Mass Market

Class 1 From Producerism to Consumerism

Strasser 1 – 54

Class 2 Advertising the American Dream
Strasser, 55-117
Archival paper due

Week XI The Consumer Society

Class 1 Imagining the Consumer
Strasser , pp 118- 145

Class 2. Make Way for Modernity
B & S, chapter 10

Week XII Business and Gender

Class 1 Men and Women in the Corporate Office
Kwoleck-Folland, 1-41

Class 2 Manhood, Sales, and the Office Wife
Kwoleck- Folland, 42-93

Week XIII War and Corporate Triumphalism

Class 1 World War II: Business and the Economy
B & S chapters 12-13

Class 2 The Cold War and American Capitalism
B & S chapters 14- 15

Week XIV African American Business

Class 1 Capitalism, Race, and Entrepreneurship
Walker, Introduction, 150-224

Class 2 Civil Rights and Business
Walker, 225-265

Week XV Final Examination due during Exam Week