

History 387

Introduction to Business History: The American Experience

(Professor William Childs)

Course Description: This course is an introduction to the study of business history. While a course in American History, it also serves as an introduction to two other courses in the Department of History:

- 568.01: Comparative Business History, and
- 568.02: Japanese Business History.

To lend coherence to these offerings, all will include material on these themes:

1. evolution of the firm (business & management strategies, firm structures);
2. evolution of business–government relations;
3. evolution of management–labor relations;
4. interactions between business and society; and,
5. general developments in economic thought, science, and technology.

This course will study the evolution of "American capitalism" within the larger framework of the development of western societies: from pre-capitalist economies of the medieval period to emergent capitalism of the 16th and 17th centuries; from the industrial revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries to managerial–financial capitalism of the 20th century, to what some have labeled postindustrial capitalism of the mid–to–late 20th century.

The student will thus gain factual knowledge of the development of American business and conceptual understanding of the study of business history. Together, these two objectives shall furnish a basis for comparison to other nation states' experience with business enterprise.

I have designed this course (degree of sophistication, reading assignments, and exams) to be a 300–level course in History. Students will have to read the assignments, think about them and the lecture material, and then write essays and short answers on topics that require them to integrate the reading and the lecture material. Thus, another objective of the course is to improve the student's abilities in analysis and writing.

Assigned Readings : Students are required to read the following books. Study guides will be furnished for all books except the text. All are available at SBX. Several copies of the textbook have been placed on reserve in the Main Library.

1. Blackford and Kerr, *Business Enterprise in American History* (3rd ed.).
2. Harold Livesay, *American Made*
3. Horatio Alger, *Ragged Dick* and *Mark, The Match Boy*
4. Kurt Vonnegut, *Player Piano*

The Blackford and Kerr text furnishes the basic chronological development of American business. *American Made* contains biographical analyses on numerous key manufacturers. The Alger novels introduce the student to the conflicts

between American values and industrialism. *Player Piano* offers a prescription for the future that is based on where business, government, and society had evolved by the 1950s.

[Note for sample syllabus: The first two books listed above have been used in the original 564 course, which is to be replaced by 387. In the current 564 course, the instructors have usually required a total of 5 books. Each instructor has experimented with different book lists. The Alger and Vonnegut novels are used here only for illustrative purposes.]

Office Hours: I encourage all students to visit me during office hours in order to discuss course concepts, problems in writing, or whatever.

Your Grade in This Course: Your grade will be based on three graded assignments: One midterm (30%); one paper (30%); and a final exam (40%). The midterm and final exam will be structured in the same manner: 50% of each exam will consist of an essay, which you will write outside of class. The other 50% will consist of short answers, which you will write during the class hours noted. Instructions and limitations on length will be furnished with the essay topics. You will have choices to make in both parts. The essay portion of the midterm and final exams will be handed in with the short answers in class.

Students will have a choice among several paper topics; some will ask for further reading beyond the required list. More information on the paper will be handed out in class.

You are forewarned that I will pursue cases of academic misconduct to the appropriate University Committee.

Three special comments:

1. Since the University does not record D- grades, *a student earning a course average below 62 will receive an E in this course.*
2. In order to pass the course, students must pass the Final Exam.
3. I reserve the right to consider improvement when determining final grades.

Grading Your Exams: Most of your grade in History 387 will be based on how well you communicate in writing what you have learned. Students should consult my handout, "Guide to Writing Short Answers and Essays in History." In addition, I furnish below brief descriptions of how you will earn your essay grades:

"C" essays will include: an introductory paragraph that contains your thesis; a body of several paragraphs in which you offer evidence from the readings and lectures to support your thesis; and a conclusion that reiterates your basic argument.

"B" essays will include: all of the above requirements for a "C" essay plus more relevant data and analyses than is found in an average essay.

"A" essays will include: all of the above requirements for a "B" essay plus more data and some indication of independent or extended thought.

As for "D" and "E" essays: usually, these essays do not include a viable thesis and/or they do not include very much information from the course.

Note : On the out-of-class portion of the exams and on the paper, students will lose points for misspellings and incorrect grammar.

Make-up Exams: As for make-up exams, I do not like them. They are inherently unfair to all concerned (you, me, and your fellow students). I realize, however, that occasionally a few students encounter problems with taking exams at the scheduled time. In these cases, you must contact me before the exam date. To make-up any exam, you will have to take it during one of the regularly scheduled exam sessions offered by the Department of History. *If you cannot contact me before the day of the exam you are to miss, you should contact the History Department office (292-2674) during regular business hours (8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Mon – Fri) to leave a message.*

Attendance Policies: Given the requirements noted above (evidence from the readings *and* lectures), I expect you to attend regularly. Very often material offered by students during discussions should be included in your answers. Most short answer topics are selected from lecture materials.

Please note: The Chair of the Department of History has decided that all students must be officially enrolled in the course by the end of the second full week of the quarter. No requests to add the course will be approved by the Department Chair after that time. Enrolling officially and on time is solely the responsibility of the student.

Other notes: Because I want you to improve your ability to take effective notes and because legal considerations and issues of equity demand it, I do not allow the use of tape recorders during class time.

Think about your fellow students: If arriving in class late, take the nearest seat available unobtrusively; if you must leave a few minutes early, sit near an exit and leave quietly.

[Students with learning disabilities should see Dr. Childs *immediately* in order to work out potential problems with notetaking, reading the assigned books, and taking the exams.]

Schedule of Lectures, Discussions, and Exams:

Week 1 [B&K, Intro, Ch 1; begin reading Alger]

Introduction to the course

Overview of the Origins of Business History

Elements of Capitalism

European Origins of American Business History

2 **_Market Capitalism

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[B &K, Ch 2; Livesay, Intro;]

Political Economy of Colonial America

Adam Smith

Business, the Revolution, and the Constitution

Jefferson vs. Hamilton: Business-Government Relations

3 [B&K, Chs 3-4; Livesay, Chs 2-3]

Early Industrialism and the Expanding Market

Discuss Alger novels

Introduce Industrialism

4 _**Managerial and Financial Capitalism

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_ [B&K, Ch 5; Livesay, Chs 4-6]

The Rise of Big Business: Railroads, Mass Manufacturing, and Distribution

Karl Marx

5 **First Exam**

Towards American-Style Welfare State Capitalism

[B &K, Chs 6-7]

Reforming Capitalism-Origins of American Labor Movement

Origins of the Administrative State

Origins of the Consumer Culture

6 [B&K, Ch 8, Ch 9 (to page 270); Livesay, Chs 7-8]

The "New Era": New Management Strategies & Firm Structures

Advertising the American Dream

7 [B&K, Ch 9]

From Illusion to Crisis in Capitalism

From Hoover to Roosevelt: The Mixed Economy & Welfare State Capitalism

John M. Keynes

8 [B&K, Chs, 10-11; begin reading Vonnegut]

****Paper due**.**

****_American Capitalism in a Changing Global Setting**

_ World War II

The Affluent Society

Exporting Capitalism

Film, "The Corporation"

9 [B&K, Chs 12-13; Livesay, Ch 9]

The Administrative State in 1960s-1970s:

The "New" Societal Regulations

Economic Deregulation

Discuss Vonnegut

****Graduating Seniors:**** You will be given a take-home final exam at the end of the 9th week. It will be due the following Tuesday.

10 [Livesay, Ch 10, 11] [distribute Final Exam Essay topics]

American Business, Organizational Capabilities and Global Competition,
1960s - 1980s

The Persistence of Small Business Enterprise

Student Evaluations and Review

The Final Exam will occur during the regularly-scheduled time. You will turn-in your final essay with your final exam.