First Year Seminar
Entrepreneurs in American History

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Office Hours: MWF 3 or by arrangement. I’m generally around from 8:30 to 5, MTWTF.

Goals:
The course’s primary goal is to understand the motives, strategies and impacts of entrepreneurs in the past, as a way to understand the challenges facing entrepreneurs of today – and because the topic is inherently interesting. Entrepreneurship is the “process by which individuals and groups take advantage of their knowledge and resources to identify and pursue opportunities, initiate change and create value in their lives and lives of others.” This course will cast a wide historical net, taking a broad view of entrepreneurship – focusing mainly on entrepreneurs in business, but also examining entrepreneurship in the public policy arena and in social movements. It will situate these entrepreneurs in the economy of their own times, exploring their successes and failures, and examining their impacts on society. The approach will blend biography with a broader view of the economy and society of each period and theories about entrepreneurship.

Students will do considerable reading, writing, discussion and critical thinking – honing all these skills. Most class meetings will center on a group discussion of the challenges facing the entrepreneur being discussed and examining the impacts of his or her choices. We will discuss both the positive and the normative – what they did and what impact they had and also what they should have done and what their critics and supporters have argued.

Grades:
Class discussion and participation = 20% Quizzes on readings = 20%
Short-papers = 30% Term paper and presentation = 30%

Short paper assignments (six) Length = c. 500 words
What was the subject’s greatest success and greatest failure as an entrepreneur? Explain carefully. What traits and external factors help explain these successes and failures?

Term paper assignment Due: November 22 (noon)
Write a 15-page paper on an entrepreneur that we haven’t covered in class and lead a 20-minute discussion of the entrepreneur. In your paper a) summarize the key facts about the entrepreneur, b) explain the most important decisions and strategies of the entrepreneur, and c) explain the impact that the entrepreneur had on society. Be prepared to answer questions and to demonstrate thorough background knowledge of the industry or arena in which he or she operated. It’s OK to write on someone who wasn’t in business – e.g. religious, scientific, educational, and social entrepreneurs are fair game.
Course schedule:

August 27 to September 3: The Role of Entrepreneurs in the Economy
    Saras Sarasvathy, “What Makes Entrepreneurs Entrepreneurial?”

September 5 to September 15: Eli Whitney
    Constance Green, Eli Whitney and the Birth of American Technology
    Two-page paper due September 15

No class meeting on September 12

September 17: Thomas Edison

September 19 to September 24: Frederic Tudor
    Gavin Weightman, The Frozen-Water Trade: A True Story
    Two-page paper due September 24

September 26 to October 8: John Rockefeller
    Ron Chernow, Titan: The Life of John D. Rockefeller, Sr.
    Two-page paper due October 6

October 10: Andrew Carnegie

October 13: George Bailey

October 15 to October 22: Charles Yerkes
    John Franch, Robber Baron: The Life of Charles Tyson Yerkes
    Two-page paper due: October 22

Fall break: October 17

October 24: Preparing for Research (meet with Mary Scanlon in ZSR Room 476)

October 27 to November 10: Jimmy Hoffa
    Thaddeus Russell, Out of the Jungle: Jimmy Hoffa and the Making of the
    American Working Class
    Two-page paper due: November 7

No class meeting on October 31

November 5: Entrepreneurial Presidents

November 12 to November 14: Thomas Watson and Robert Noyce

Week of November 17: No class meetings, work on your term paper

**Term paper due: November 22 (noon)**

November 24 to December 5 and Saturday, December 6 at noon

Presentation of term papers