

# Syllabus: American Business History: History 363

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Office Hours: Mondays 2:00-3:30 or Thursdays: 11:30-1:00 or by appointment

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Office Hours: Tues. and Wed. 3:30-4:30 or by appointment

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 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.)

Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA's Seventy-Year Quest for Cheap Labor*

Michael Lewis, *The Big Short*

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

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: Instructions will be posted soon. About 10% of the course grade.
2. Midterm exam: Thursday, May 3. About 25% of course grade.
3. Short paper due at class time Tuesday, May 24. About 25% of course grade. INSTRUCTIONS AND OPTIONS COMING SOON.

4. Final exam: Wed., June 13, 13:00-15:00. 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.

### **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.

**April 3:** Introduction and Tycoon #1: Robert Keayne

**April 5:** Colonial Merchants and an (almost) Global Economy

By this date, read Benjamin Franklin, "[The Way to Wealth](#)," (1757); the first seven pages contain the document. The rest is a commentary which is not required. Also, watch Part 1 and Part 3 of an audiovisual series on the business of the slave trade in Rhode Island:

<http://cache.projo.com/extra/2006/slavery/>

**April 10:** Independence and the Constitution and Tycoon #2: John Jacob Astor

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

**April 12:** 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](#)

**April 17:** The Legal "Release of Energy," Pre-Civil War Growth and the Transportation Revolution

**April 19:** Tycoon #3: a video on P.T. Barnum

By this date, read Barnum, "[The Road to Riches](#)", chapter 9, pp.133-155 of his memoirs, *Struggles and Triumphs* (1875). The link goes to the Google version of the book. Click on the link to chapter 9 to go to page 133. Using the arrows at the top of pages, you can move forward from there.

**April 24:** The Railroads as America's First Big Business

**April 26:** Mass Production and Mass Distribution and Tycoon #4: Andrew Carnegie

By this date, read Porter, *The Rise of Big Business*, chapters 1 and 2. Also read Andrew Carnegie's 1889 essay, "[Wealth.](#)" Also, browse the online [Sears, Roebuck catalogue of 1897](#)

**May 1:** Finance and Control of Big Business and Tycoon #5: J. Pierpont Morgan

**May 3: MIDTERM EXAM**

By the midterm, read Porter, *The Rise of Big Business*, chapter 3 (Bibliographical essay is not required); Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves*, Introduction and chapter 1 (pp.1-40)

**May 8:** Frederick W. Taylor and Scientific Management (You can think of Taylor as a bonus tycoon.)

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

Thorstein Veblen, "[On the Nature and Uses of Sabotage](#)" (chapter one, pp.4-18, of Veblen, *The Engineers and the Price System*, 1921).

**May 10:** Taylor and Later Theories of Management

**May 15:** Working for Big Business I

**May 17:** Working for Big Business II

By this date, finish Cowie, *Capital Moves*

**May 22:** Making a Consumer Society and Tycoon #6: Bruce Barton

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

**May 24:** Women and People of Color in American Business and Tycoon #7: Madame C.J. Walker

**May 29: SHORT PAPER DUE:** The World of Wal-Mart

By this date, start reading Michael Lewis, *The Big Short*, chapters tba

**May 31:** The World of Finance and the Great Recession, Part I and Tycoon(s) #8: George Soros/Charles and David Koch

**June 5:** Finance and the Great Recession, Part II

By this date, finish Lewis, *The Big Short*, chapters tba

**June 7:** The Future of Capitalism--The Vision of Joseph Schumpeter, a Pessimistic Supporter

By this date, read brief excerpts from Joseph Schumpeter, to be posted.

Final Exam: **Wednesday, June 13, 13:00-15:00**

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