

# Business History

Seminar · English · Undergraduate / Graduate

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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

A thematic introduction to the field of business history, tracing the firm and the broader business landscape from the preindustrial era through industrialisation, the rise of big business, the interwar period, and into globalisation and decolonisation. The seminar combines key historiographical texts with student presentations on focused case-study questions.

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## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Familiarity with core debates and approaches in business history.
  - Ability to situate firms and industries in their wider economic, political, and social contexts across the 19th and 20th centuries.
  - Critical engagement with comparative and transnational perspectives on business.
  - Practice in independent research, oral presentation, and academic writing.
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## TOPICS

### 1. Introduction to business history as a field.

*Basic text: Patrick Fridenson, "Business History and History," in The Oxford Handbook of Business History, OUP, 2007, pp. 9–36.*

### 2. The company between the preindustrial era and the First Industrial Revolution.

*Basic text: Franco Amatori and Andrea Colli, Business History: Complexities and Comparisons, Routledge, 2011, pp. 29–50.*

### 3. The world of big business before 1914.

*Basic text: Youssef Cassis, Big Business: The European Experience in the 20th Century, OUP, 1997, pp. 9–30.*

### 4. Business from the 1920s to the 1950s.

*Basic text: Cassis, Big Business, pp. 31–62.*

### 5. Americanization in the interwar period.

*Basic text: Steven Tolliday, "Transplanting the American Model?" in Americanization and Its Limits, OUP, 2000, pp. 76–93.*

### 6. Business and National Socialism.

*Basic text: Werner Plumpe, "Business and Industry under National Socialism," in German Economic and Business History, Palgrave, 2016, pp. 105–135.*

### 7. The rise of multinational enterprises.

*Basic text: Geoffrey Jones, "Multinationals from the 1930s to the 1980s," in Leviathans, CUP, 2005, pp. 81–104.*

### 8. Decolonising business and business in emerging markets.

*Basic text: Stephanie Decker, "Africanization in Companies and the Civil Service," in Postcolonial Transition and Global Business History, Routledge, 2022, pp. 117–149.*

### 9. Globalisation.

*Basic text: Geoffrey Jones, "Globalization and Beauty," in Global Business and the Making of the Modern World, Edward Elgar, 2013, pp. 57–67.*

### 10. Final discussion.

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## METHODOLOGICAL FOCUS

Close reading of foundational texts paired with student presentations that can set their own analytical accents within each thematic focus. Emphasis on comparative and transnational framing.

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## ASSESSMENT

Oral presentation (with discussion moderation) and a written research paper.

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## CORE TEXTS

- Patrick Fridenson, “Business History and History,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Business History*, ed. Jones and Zeitlin, OUP, 2007, pp. 9–36.
- Franco Amatori and Andrea Colli, *Business History: Complexities and Comparisons*, Routledge, 2011.
- Youssef Cassis, *Big Business: The European Experience in the 20th Century*, OUP, 1997.
- Steven Tolliday, “Transplanting the American Model?” in *Americanization and Its Limits*, ed. Zeitlin and Herrigel, OUP, 2000.
- Werner Plumpe, *German Economic and Business History in the 19th and 20th Century*, Palgrave, 2016.
- Geoffrey Jones, “Multinationals from the 1930s to the 1980s,” in *Leviathans*, ed. Chandler and Mazlish, CUP, 2005.
- Stephanie Decker, *Postcolonial Transition and Global Business History*, Routledge, 2022.
- Geoffrey Jones, *Global Business and the Making of the Modern World*, Edward Elgar, 2013.

## Further Recommended

- Alfred D. Chandler Jr., *The Visible Hand*, Harvard University Press, 1977.
- Geoffrey Jones and Jonathan Zeitlin (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Business History*, OUP, 2007.
- Mira Wilkins, *The History of Foreign Investment in the United States*, Harvard University Press, 1989/2004.
- Hartmut Berghoff and Jürgen Kocka (eds.), *Business in the Age of Extremes*, CUP, 2013.