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## Philip Scranton & Patrick Fridenson's Reimagining Business History

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activist entrepreneurship, adds considerably to what we know about business history and the attendant movements explored in these chapters. While each sought to transform American culture, all failed to do so. Yet their contributions, examples, and successes are perhaps greater than Davis allows.

The book has some drawbacks. The chapters are lengthy at nearly fifty pages each. At times, some become circuitous and repetitive. There are minor errors, too, which frustrate the reader. The UNIA, Marcus Garvey's *Universal Negro Improvement Association*, is referred to throughout as the *United Negro Improvement Association*. Other substantive drawbacks include cumulative footnotes at the end of each paragraph with references to numerous texts and quotes, not all of which are easily identifiable. The book has no bibliography and only an abbreviated index. These are likely editorial decisions, but they do detract from the book's appeal for use in the classroom and as a quick reference source.

Despite this, Davis's research is deep and thorough. He brings together several movements that are often approached in isolation and provides the lens of business and entrepreneurship. This is no small contribution to several historiographies. There is much to learn from this text.

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Philip Scranton and Patrick Fridenson. *Reimagining Business History*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013. x + 260 pp. ISBN 978-1-4214-0862-0, \$25 (paper).

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Philip Scranton and Patrick Fridenson—two senior scholars from Rutgers University and École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris, respectively—have brought together their decades of experience as practitioners and editors to explore new directions in research and writing in business history. But this is a different kind of historiographical book. In fact, it is “the inverse of a historiographical analysis”; it seeks to provide a “prospective” “collection of ordered, grouped assertions” (9). It is a “book of perspectives” that “has purposes not an argument” and is intended to be browsed, not read cover

to cover. Yet, the authors clearly take aim at “traditional business history” and encourage business historians to step “away from our decades-long reliance on economics, economic history, and management science” (9). In doing so, they intend to bring business history into wider debates in humanistic and social science inquiries.

The book is divided into four parts—“Traps” to be avoided, “Opportunities” for future inquiries, “Prospects” that are currently underway, and “Resources” for organizing new research agendas. Forty-three pithy “entries” (ix), rather than more conventional chapters, provide a discursive framework.

Part I of the book outlines several interconnected pitfalls of traditional business history, which they identify as the Chandlerian paradigm. Alfred Chandler, as business historians know, pioneered organizational studies of the modern business enterprise in the United States, explaining how technological advances coupled with the visible hand of management transformed production, marketing, and distribution. Technological imperatives, rather than political or social concerns, created the industrial society. For Scranton and Fridenson, Chandler’s work guided the field toward an American hegemony with the large-scale firm at center stage. Rather than “privileging the firm” (entry 4), however, Scranton and Fridenson urge readers to consider “a broader ecology of organizational life forms,” such as “*triadic* enterprise-nonprofit-state interactions” (emphasis in original) and “relations between firms and societies’ non-businesses” (27). Additionally, the authors argue that conventional business history has “retrospectively rationalize[d] human and business performances that were often experimental, chaotic, indeterminate, and conflictual” (31). Those histories too often fail to account for the unforeseen and unintended consequences of a range of decision makers, and thus provide a false sense of teleological progress and obscure the deep contingency of historical decision making (entry 5: retrospective rationalization). Indeed, as the authors note, since the closing of the American century, “a diversity of perspectives and prospects” (34) have emerged that move the point of inquiry beyond the large-scale corporation, the managerial elite, or the efficiency of markets (entry 6: searching for a new dominant paradigm).

Parts II and III of the book—thematic “opportunities” and developing “prospects”—lay out promising research agendas. Perhaps most interestingly, the authors urge business historians to investigate non-traditional business enterprises, such as nonprofits and cooperatives, as well as public-private partnerships. These quasi-business forms may challenge business historians to then consider the larger political economy within which leaders in business and government make decisions and coevolve. Across multiple jurisdictions, for example,

health-care industries have been shaped by state policies and industry lobbying that allocate risks and rewards—as those policies change, so do business structures, services, and standards of care (94). These emergent trends in business history defy public–private boundaries and require new frameworks for evaluating complexity, improvisation, and uncertainty (each of which constitutes an entry). Since the publication of this volume five years ago, new scholarship in business history has indeed followed the authors’ cues. This includes work on the rise of a service economy; the “financialization” of the economy; the “gig economy” and precarious work; and the business history of war.

In Part IV, “Resources,” the authors challenge business historians to evaluate the “unexamined assumptions that animate and situate research and discourse” (188) by employing new concepts and frameworks. The entry on modernity offers a new periodization for business historians to interrogate the changing relationship between business and society. The authors borrow from sociologists’ conceptualization of “solid” modernity, exemplified by heavy industry production methods and societal organization, and its “devolution” to “liquid” modernity, or the current era’s more mobile or flexible capitalism. While these categories of modernity provide a critique of the current global elite, “globalized consumption,” and “societal divides” (220), the framework also deserves closer historical scrutiny to explain the timing, spatial orientation, and contingency of new technologies, business strategies, and public policies that either facilitated this new regime, or did not.

This bold and eclectic collection offers valuable guidance for business historians, perhaps especially graduate students searching for research topics, conceptual frameworks, and modes of communication. Indeed, it is incumbent upon all business historians to reach not only other historians but also other disciplines through our own strengths, which perhaps lie not in grand narratives and economic abstraction—as the authors argue—but in historicizing and denaturalizing business forms, interfirm organizational strategies, and global trade patterns that we have perhaps taken for granted. Those students would be wise to heed the authors’ advice to broaden one’s toolkit beyond business archives, economic analysis, or managerial sciences. Yet much of their critique of traditional business history’s resources, assumptions, and conclusions has been unfolding for decades, and most traditionalists would argue that the newer perspectives, while important and valuable, have supplemented rather than replaced the older Chandlerian model. Given the centrality of large-scale enterprises to the functioning of the globalized political economy, particularly with its currently precarious position, we would do well

to integrate the paradigms, learning from the traditionalists while also exploring these new avenues. This “prospective historiography” (240) offers valuable insights for any historian, not only those self-identifying as business historians, who must confront businesses, quasi-businesses, businesspeople, or regulation in order to better understand our modern world.

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*The Technological Indian* takes its starting point in addressing a historical puzzle. How is it possible that in the late nineteenth century, in the context of British colonialism, Indians were considered “not a mechanical race” (p. 2, based on a quote by a former governor of Bombay), when today it has become so common, almost stereotypical, for young middle-class Indians to seek engineering careers? “How did ‘Indian’ and ‘technological’ go from being mutually exclusive to being practically synonymous for the Indian middle-class?” (3). Author Ross Bassett is uniquely qualified to explore this question. He received an undergraduate degree in electrical engineering before becoming a historian (MA from Cornell, PhD from Princeton). He is now a professor at the History Department at North Carolina State University, where he also serves as director of the Benjamin Franklin Scholars Program, which encourages engineering students to simultaneously pursue a degree in humanities or social sciences.

Bassett’s monograph is based on a database of approximately 850 Indian engineering graduates from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) from the 1880s to the 2000s, a database he built from MIT commencement programs. Using a wide variety of additional sources, such as government archives, business and personal records, and oral histories, Bassett traces these graduates’ lives and careers across more than 120 years. Indeed, it is a great strength of the book that the author so expertly contextualizes the individual biographies in the wider social and political history of both India and the United States, giving a panoramic view of their lives and experiences.