

Immigrant Entrepreneurship

German-American Business Biographies

1720 TO THE PRESENT



Female Entrepreneurship in the United States: German-American Businesswomen from the Nineteenth to the Twenty-First Century

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*Suggested framework for a short unit consisting of four sessions in an upper-level undergraduate/graduate course in **German-American Studies, Gender Studies, German-American History, Business and Entrepreneurship Studies***

Objectives: In the past, the economic contributions of women to American society were often overlooked or only marginally addressed within the context of American business. But women have always been an integral part of the labor market and have, over the centuries, overcome considerable restrictions for females in education and in the workforce in order to pursue their business activities and become significant entrepreneurs in their own right. This sample teaching plan focuses on German female entrepreneurs and the establishment of their businesses in the United States from the nineteenth to the early twenty-first century. It is designed to familiarize students with the nature of women's entrepreneurial endeavors and explore notions of gender in the context of business as well as higher education. The thematic sections explore the impact of social, economic, and legal conditions on female education and entrepreneurship in North America. Individual biographies from the *Immigrant Entrepreneurship* project serve as case studies and are supplemented by suggestions for further readings. In combination, the texts will allow students to gain a better understanding of legal and economic restrictions as well as cultural expectations of female entrepreneurs.

SESSION 1. INTRODUCTION: UNDERSTANDING NOTIONS OF GENDER AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE PREINDUSTRIAL WORLD

Guiding Questions: What status did women have socially and economically in preindustrial America? What kind of legal and social restrictions were in place during this time period? In what ways were women "economic actors," and why have they not been recognized as such throughout history?

Goals: Students will become familiar with women's status in the family and in business in preindustrial North America. They will also obtain a critical view of notions such as gender and

entrepreneurship. Furthermore, students will gain an understanding of why women as “economic actors” have long been overlooked in American history, and how changing legal and social conditions influenced women’s entrepreneurial activities.

Topical Reading:

- Kwolek-Folland, Angel. *Incorporating Women: A History of Women and Business in the United States*. New York; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

This survey, with extensive research from primary and secondary sources, combines the history of women and the history of business in the United States, spanning from the preindustrial period to the late twentieth century. Kwolek-Folland illustrates in detail how legal and social conditions either prevented or promoted business opportunities for women. Particularly valuable for this session are the following two chapters:

- Chapter 1: Incorporating Others: The Social Categories of Business History. 1-11.
- Chapter 2: Female Economies: Women and Business in Preindustrial America, 1550-1830. 12-45.

<p>SESSION 2. “CENTURIES OF STRUGGLE AND OPPORTUNITIES”: THE GERMAN-AMERICAN WOMEN’S RIGHTS MOVEMENT AND FEMALE COLLEGE EDUCATION IN THE LATE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES</p>

Guiding Questions: What were the premises of the (German-American) women’s rights movement(s) of the late nineteenth century; what were their political agendas? What role did nativism play, and how did it affect concerns regarding ethnicity and gender? What opportunities did college education offer women as they entered the labor market? Which jobs were typical for women during this time period, which were exceptional?

Goals: Students will become familiar with the political, economic, and legal restrictions imposed on women during the nineteenth century. They will learn about the women’s rights movement in which women fought for equality. Students will gain an understanding of the different camps within this movement and learn that German-American feminists served as translators and messengers in order to convey women’s concerns about ethnicity and gender. Furthermore, students will gain a better appreciation for the premises of female college education and the interconnectedness between changes in the labor market and college education for women.

Primary Materials from the Immigrant Entrepreneurship Website:

- [Mathilde Franziska Anneke \(née Giesler\) \(1817-1884\)](#): As one of the most famous women among the German “Forty-Eighters” who immigrated to the United States, Anneke continued her political engagement on the other side of the Atlantic and

became a prominent figure in the German-American women's rights movement. Anneke was a well-educated feminist and businesswoman.

- [Mary Hegeler Carus \(1861-1936\)](#): Pursuing an unusual path for a woman of her time, Carus received an outstanding education and was the first woman in history to graduate from the University of Michigan's Engineering College in 1882. After several battles for control over the Matthiessen and Hegeler Zinc Company due to gender bias, Carus was finally able to run her father's business.

Topical Readings:

- Bank, Michaela. *Women of Two Countries: German-American Women, Women's Rights and Nativism, 1848-1890*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2012.
Bank focuses on the roles and ideals of German-American women in the U.S. women's rights movement of the late nineteenth century, and how they differed from those of native-born American women. By using examples of German immigrants Mathilde Wendt, Mathilde Franziska Anneke, and Clara Neymann's involvement in the women's rights movement, Bank illustrates how concerns of nativism and gender were debated and changed over time. Note: The introduction provides useful material for class discussion. The subsequent chapters can be used either for more in-depth readings/class discussions or as readings for other assignments (i.e. research papers, etc.).
- Cookingham, Mary E. "Bluestocking, Spinsters and Pedagogues: Women College Graduates, 1865-1910." *Population Studies*, Vol. 38, No 3 (November 1984), 349-364. This article focuses on the demographic and nuptial behavior of female college graduates and describes and connects female enrolment in college/high school with women's opportunities on the labor market in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

SESSION 3. MARRIAGE, HOUSEHOLD, AND CAREER: BUSINESSWOMEN UP TO THE POSTWAR PERIOD

Guiding Questions: What did the legal status of marriage offer women regarding their educational and economic activities in the late nineteenth century? How did women (and men) profit economically from marriage? How did the Women's Program and women clinics help women to become economically active? Why was the link between homes and businesses for female entrepreneurship important during the Second World War and the postwar period?

Goals: Students will learn that marriage in nineteenth-century American society allowed women to access business communities but also to support men in their entrepreneurial activities. Students will become familiar with state measures that helped women start their own entrepreneurial enterprises as means of economic recovery in postwar America. Students

will obtain a better understanding of how the linkage between domesticity and entrepreneurship served as a vital factor in many female careers.

Primary Materials from the Immigrant Entrepreneurship Website:

- [Lillian Vernon \(1927-\)](#): Overcoming traditional expectations that women would serve solely as housewives and mothers, Vernon started her own catalogue business as a young, pregnant housewife. It would become the first female-owned company listed on the NY Stock Exchange.
- [Charlotte Cramer Sachs \(1907-2004\)](#): Sachs, a single, working mother in pre-war Germany, immigrated to the United States and founded a company specializing in the manufacture of prepared food mixes. While she helped other working housewives with her ready-made baking goods, the New York State Department of Commerce's Woman's Program supported Sachs as she advanced her own entrepreneurial endeavors.

Topical Readings:

- Lindsey, Debra. "Intimate Inmates: Wives, Households, and the Science in Nineteenth-Century America." *Isis*, Vol. 89, No. 4 (December 1998), 631-652.
Using the example of scientific societies, this article depicts how nineteenth-century marriages and economic bonding with spouses helped both parties—men and women—to advance in their entrepreneurial enterprises.
- Michals, Debra. "Toward a New History of the Postwar Economy: Prosperity, Preparedness, and Women's Small Business Ownership." *Business and Economic History*. Vol. 26, No. 1 (Fall 1997), 45-56.
This article focuses on Governor Dewey's Women's Program in New York and shows how early links between small businesses and domesticity not only brought about economic recovery but also enabled women to combine financial needs, personal ambitions, and familial obligations in postwar America.

SESSION 4. "ONE TOUGH MOTHER": CASE STUDIES OF SUCCESSFUL FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS IN MALE-DOMINATED INDUSTRIES IN TWENTIETH AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY AMERICA

Guiding Questions: What was the economic situation in America when female entrepreneurs started/took over their family's businesses? What specifically helped them to become successful in a male-dominated industry? What challenges did they face?

Goals: Students will critically analyze the situation of female entrepreneurs in a male-dominated business world in the 1960 and 1970s. They will reflect on the challenges and

difficulties that businesswomen had to overcome. Students will gain a better appreciation of (hi)stories of women who overcame personal hardship to become prosperous business leaders.

Primary Materials from the Immigrant Entrepreneurship Website:

- [Sue Mengers \(1932-2011\)](#): Mengers established herself as a powerful and legendary talent agent in Hollywood—a business normally ruled by men. Menger’s biography is not only a narrative of her persecution and flight from Germany during National Socialism, but also an illustration of how Mengers managed to become a leading force in her field during a time of enormous economic challenges and transformation.
- [Gertrude Boyle \(1924-\)](#): After taking over her father’s company, Columbia Sportswear, upon her husband’s death, Boyle not only became a female leader in a male-dominated industry, she also managed to turn her father’s small business into an internationally successful, multi-million-dollar enterprise.

Topical Reading:

- Kwolek-Folland, Angel. *Incorporating Women: A History of Women and Business in the United States*. New York; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
Particularly valuable for this session is Chapter 6: Difference at Work: The Renewal of the Businesswoman, 1963-2000, 168-210, especially pages 189-198: “Female Proprietors and CEOs”

Additional Readings for the Entire Unit:

- Butler, John E. *New Perspectives on Women Entrepreneurs*. Greenwich, Conn: Information Age Pub, 2003.
 - Especially Chapter 1: Feminist theory and the study of entrepreneurship, 1-24.
- Graham, Patricia Albjerg. “Expansion and Exclusion: A History of Women in American Higher Education.” *Signs*, Vol 3, No. 4 (Summer 1978): 759-773.
- Henkel, Martin and Rolf Taubert. *Das Weib im Conflict mit den Socialen Verhältnissen*. Bochum: Égalité, 1976.
- Kaplan, Marion A. *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class: Women, Family, and Identity in Imperial Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991)
- Langdon, Emily A. “Women’s Colleges Then and Now: Access then, Equality Now.” *Peabody Journal of Education*, Vol. 76, No. 1, Access and Equity in Postsecondary Education (2001): 5-30.
- Lewis, Susan Ingalls. *Unexceptional Women: Female Proprietors in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Albany, New York, 1830-1885*. Ohio State UP, 2009.