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Smithsonian’s “American Enterprise” Explores Business History *Exhibition Opens July 1 in the National Museum of American History*



Visitors to the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History will be immersed in the dramatic arc of labor, power, wealth, success and failure in America as the museum opens “American Enterprise” in the Mars Hall of American Business July 1. The nation’s business story will unfold in an 8,000-square-foot gallery that is the anchor exhibition in the museum’s new Innovation Wing.

Through more than 600 objects, images, hands-on activities and video, “American Enterprise” traces the country’s development from a small, dependent agricultural nation to one of the world’s most vibrant economies.

“Our goal is to make history essential by presenting the compelling ideas and ideals of America and animating them through transformative experiences,” said John Gray, the museum’s director. “‘American Enterprise’ chronicles the tumultuous interaction between capitalism and the common good, which is fundamental to understanding our history and our global role.”

The exhibition is made possible by significant support from Mars, Incorporated, the Wallace H. Coulter Foundation and SC Johnson. Generous support came from Intel, Monsanto Company, the United Soybean Board and History Channel. Additional support is provided by Motorola Foundation, 3M, Pete and Linda Claussen, the William T. Kemper Foundation and John Deere.

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“American Enterprise” will convey the drama, breadth and diversity of America’s business heritage along with its benefits, failures and unanticipated consequences, through four chronological eras: the Merchant Era (1770s–1850s), the Corporate Era (1860s–1930s), the Consumer Era (1940s– 1970s) and the Global Era (1980s–2010s). Within these eras are woven stories on advertising and a biography wall with capsule stories of inventors, entrepreneurs, marketers, regulators and others.

Eli Whitney’s cotton gin, a Fordson tractor, Barbara McClintock’s microscope and Stanley Cohen’s recombinant DNA research notebook will demonstrate the development in agriculture that ranges from machines that increased productivity to science that gave insight to the genetic structure of plants. Alexander Graham Bell’s experimental telephone, a New York Stock Exchange booth that witnessed the crash of 1929, Alfred Bloomingdale’s personal credit card, an early Monopoly board game and Michael Bloomberg’s Bloomberg terminal are among the artifacts that will illustrate manufacturing, retail and service, and technology in American business.

Stories of women in business range from that of Elizabeth Patterson Bonaparte, one of the richest women in early America, to Madame C.J. Walker’s haircare company to Rosalind Brewer, the CEO of Sam’s Club. America’s growing consumer culture will be illustrated with displays of popular advertisements from landmark campaigns to marketing campaigns targeted to diverse audiences, including teens, African Americans and Latinos. Familiar brand names from 1950s radio and television ads to today’s digital marketing showcase how marketers created new ways of thinking about the relationship between consumers and products.

The Wallace H. Coulter Exchange hub is filled with interactive displays to provide a hands-on understanding of markets and business practices. Visitors can light the “Tower of Power;” take the Farming Challenge or start a cat food business. The state-of-the-art SC Johnson Conference Center will allow the museum to share “American Enterprise” with educators and students across the nation.

The exhibit’s website will launch July 1 at <http://americanenterprise.si.edu>. Smithsonian Books is the publisher of the companion book, *American Enterprise: A History of Business in America*.

Architecture firm EwingCole is responsible for the planning and design of the 45,000-square-foot Innovation Wing with Grunley Construction as the general contractor. Haley Sharpe Design (HSD) designed “American Enterprise” with fabrication and installation by Design and Production Incorporated. Interactives and video components were provided by History Channel and Cortina Productions.

The National Museum of American History is located on Constitution Avenue N.W. between 12th and 14th Streets. To learn more about the museum, check <http://americanhistory.si.edu>.

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