

else. Books, of course, must end, and these later events move beyond Eccles's case for spending as antidote to depression. Though readers may not be as sympathetic to Eccles's spending philosophy as Nelson, *Jumping the Abyss* will nevertheless be a valuable work for scholars interested in the New Deal's economic policies and their legacies in policy debates today.

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*Cornering the Market: Independent Grocers and Innovation in American Small Business.* By: Susan V. Spellman. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. Pp. 226. \$78.00, hardcover.  
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In this concise national study of the independent grocery trade in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, historian Susan Spellman makes a compelling case for the importance of small business. Suggesting that the story of American capitalism has too often focused on big retailers and manufacturers, she argues that small businessmen were more than “bit players in industrialization’s drama,” and instead were a driving force behind the transformation of the nineteenth-century economy (p. 3). The history of these ordinary businesspeople—and the fact that they were businesspeople is a central part of her argument—is both entertaining and illuminating. It is also a highly relevant account as the American retail landscape undergoes an immense transformation, something Spellman shows has happened before within the grocery trade. As brick-and-mortar retail formats of all sizes encounter changing consumer habits and increased competition from the virtual marketplace, not to mention potential changes in the supply chain, it is important to look at the past for ways to understand the present. *Cornering the Market* suggests that individual economic actors, like neighbourhood grocers, interacted with commercial capitalism and helped shape it after the Civil War. Small businesses were also innovators and initiators of the centralizing, rationalizing, and standardizing methods typically associated with large-scale corporations like chain stores. This is a strong claim, but one that is backed up convincingly with a wealth of qualitative evidence drawn from archives and trade publications.

The book looks primarily at independent grocers and local and regional grocery chains—establishments that retailed a general line of food products, a category distinct from supermarkets. The modern grocery trade emerged in part through efforts to distance itself from “grog shop” roots in the face of the temperance movement. Emerging from its association with liquor, grocers modernized as they encountered new accounting methods and technology. Spellman makes the case, however, that merchants were not passive recipients of cost accounting and cash registers, but that they played a role in their development and spread. Hers is a story of agency in other ways as well. Travelling grocery salesmen facilitated the spread of new information systems, particularly to do with assessing creditworthiness and ascertaining risk. Small-businessmen’s actions, then, served as precursors to the rationalization efforts seen in large-scale corporations. Spellman details the standardized approach of salesmen like Samuel Iseman who drew on social and family networks to expand his wholesale grocery trade with

southern merchants. Without formal sales training in modern methods, salesmen like Iseman structured their time and efforts, used systematic and regular customer evaluations in their reports, and worked in different ways to reduce waste and lower risk. While department stores sought to tighten the supply chain and eliminate waste, the middleman endured via the wholesale grocery trade. Spellman details the complex story of grocery wholesalers and their battles with retail grocers, concluding that their efforts at consolidation and cooperation (respectively) pointed in the direction of methods that would ultimately define the modern grocery trade.

The final chapter looks at the independent grocers' complex relationship with chains in the 1920s and 1930s, covering the emergence of self-service, anti-chain legislation, and independents' adoption of chain methods. While this is not a story of the rise of supermarkets, which in the post-WWII period became the dominant retailing form for selling food, the book's conclusion provides an insightful discussion of recent developments in the grocery trade. Drawing on census data, she shows how these smaller stores persist, even though it is the massive supermarket that dominates perceptions about grocery retailing. Any discussion of American retailing today cannot ignore Walmart and Spellman does not. By putting this recent battle between the behemoth Walmart and other food retailers in the context of a longer timeframe, she notes that language and methods of local retailing that emerged within the grocery trade over one hundred years ago are part of Walmart's corporate strategy. And Walmart competitors—supermarket chains like Kroger, Safeway, and Giant Eagle—seem to be moving back toward smaller, community-centered formats.

Economic historians might wish for more quantitative documentation for Spellman's claims. Census records are used when possible and the book includes a few tables, but it does not quantify the adoption of modern or "progressive" business practices that are described largely anecdotally. However, this is a beautifully written, well-researched book that has much to offer students and historians of retail and American business with its call to look beyond big business as the progenitor of modern capitalism. In addition, it contributes to an important body of work on political economy and the history of capitalism in the United States, one that looks at the crucial interplay between business, the state, and consumers.

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*Roaring Metropolis: Businessmen's Campaign for a Civic Welfare State.* By Daniel Amsterdam. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016. Pp. 240. \$45.00, cloth.

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Social scientists interested in the political economy of cities in the early twentieth century will find a fresh perspective in Daniel Amsterdam's *Roaring Metropolis*. The book explores the political underpinnings of the *civic* welfare state, which is the term Amsterdam uses to refer to elements of urban social policy generally promoted by business leaders at the time. These same corporate interests were generally opposed to government-sponsored *social* welfare programs intended to reduce poverty and