This book offers a bold new interpretation of American business history during the formative years 1870–1920, which mark the dawn of modern big business. It focuses on four major revolutions that ushered in this new era: those in power, transportation, communication, and organization. Using the metaphor of America as an economic hothouse uniquely suited to rapid economic growth during these years, it analyzes the interplay of key factors such as entrepreneurial talent, technology, land, natural resources, law, mass markets, and the rise of cities. It also delineates the process that laid the foundation for the modern era, in which virtually every human activity became a business, and, in most cases, a big business. The book also profiles numerous major entrepreneurs whose careers and activities illustrate broader trends and themes. It utilizes a wide variety of sources, including novels from the period, to produce a lively narrative.

Maury Klein (B.A., Knox College; M.A., Ph.D., Emory University) has been a professor of history at the University of Rhode Island since 1964, receiving a Doctor of Humanities degree and the Distinguished Alumni Award from Knox College in 2001. Klein has been a Newcomen Fellow at Harvard Business School and held a Mellon Fellowship at Hagley Museum and Library. He has published thirteen books, and his numerous articles have appeared in Forbes, City, the Wall Street Journal, the Washington Post, American History Illustrated, Sports Illustrated, and Civil War Times Illustrated. Klein has also appeared in documentaries on the BBC and PBS, among other networks.
CAMBRIDGE ESSENTIAL HISTORIES

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John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, Early Cold War Spies: The Espionage Trials That Shaped American Politics
For Kim and Shannon, with love
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In the nineteenth century, the United States underwent a remarkable transformation from an economy based on the production of raw materials and subsistence agriculture to an expanding market economy. In this transformation, handicraft production was replaced by factory production; an elaborate canal system and, later, railroads supplanted a poor transportation system based on rivers and seasonal roads; and rural life began to give way to urban life. By the end of the nineteenth century, the United States had outdistanced England, France, and Germany in the rate of economic growth, per capita wealth, and general prosperity.

These changes were more than just material; they included a shift in mentality. Tried and true patterns of behavior no longer appeared to provide a true compass for responding to this market revolution. Social and cultural life had been reconfigured and continued to undergo startling changes. The only constant seemed to be change itself.

This tremendous growth presents to the student of history important and fascinating questions: How exactly did this happen? What explains American economic success? These questions have intrinsic value for understanding American history. The obvious explanation is that the United States was uniquely blessed with an abundance of natural resources, industrious and innovative people, and a political and legal system that encouraged economic growth, but there is more to the story.

At the center lay American business. Already in the nineteenth century, Europeans and Asians looked at American business for lessons to apply in their own countries. The genesis of the American economic miracle, as historian Maury Klein observes, lay in technological innovation that changed energy sources, transportation, and communication. These changes coincided with an organizational revolution in American business, as giant
business firms and organizations revolutionized existing relationships in all aspects of American life – social, economic, cultural, and political. Underlying these profound changes was a more fundamental force: people. Klein presents a remarkable drama that includes a cast of visionaries who sensed the sweep of history, reactionaries who lamented the loss of a seemingly idyllic past, and others caught in the throes of historical transformation.

Donald T. Crithchlow
General Editor, Cambridge Essential Histories