

Early-Career Scholars Research Fund Proposal: Peter Drucker's Turn to "Entrepreneurship"

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Few individuals have done more to popularize the notion of "entrepreneurship" in the United States than the Austrian-American management scholar and consultant Peter Drucker. An explicit emphasis on entrepreneurship, however, arose relatively late in Drucker's thinking. The central focus of Drucker's first publications, in the 1940s and early 1950s, was the promotion of social cohesion and what he called the "plant community." Why did Drucker shift his focus from the plant community to the figure of the "innovative" entrepreneur starting in the 1950s? Despite his intellectual and practical influence, Drucker has received scant attention from academic historians, and the problem of the evolution of his thought and his management prescriptions has suffered even more neglect. Historians such as Daniel Immerwahr and Nils Gilman who have examined Drucker's career in detail have focused on one side or the other of his late 1950s transition. My work on Drucker, which will form the third chapter of my dissertation on the history of the "entrepreneurship" concept in the twentieth-century U.S., places this question front and center.

The Early-Career Scholars Research Fund will enable me to travel to the Drucker Archives on the campus of the Claremont Graduate University, near Los Angeles. Archival research will allow me to explore two dimensions of the emergence of entrepreneurship in Drucker's thought. First, access to correspondence will allow me to understand Drucker's engagement with other intellectuals, and especially with other scholars who grappled in the 1950s with automation and the possible advent of a "post-industrial" society. Intellectuals as diverse as Hannah Arendt, Herbert Marcuse, and C.L.R. James wondered openly if there would be any work left in the automated economy of the future. I hypothesize that the concepts of entrepreneurship and innovation allowed Drucker to characterize the kind of work that automation could never touch, what he called "knowledge work." Entrepreneurial knowledge work, according to Drucker, was a process of ceaseless learning, adaptation, and innovation, requiring the worker to identify themselves on a subjective level with their work. This personal stance could then, in theory, immunize knowledge work against replacement through automation. Access to manuscripts and notes will help me examine the way that Drucker's language, especially the concepts of knowledge work and entrepreneurship, evolved alongside one another, and the relationship of Drucker's conceptual thinking to his engagement with his day-to-day reading, communication, and consulting activities.

Costs would include approximately \$200 for a round-trip flight between Boston and Los Angeles; approximately \$700 dollars for lodging for seven nights; \$350 for food for seven days; and \$200 for transport to and from the airport and other incidental transportation costs. I have not applied for any other funding to cover the cost of this research.

Erik Baker  
Curriculum Vitae

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**EDUCATION:**

**Ph.D., History of Science**, Harvard University, 2021 (expected).

Dissertation: *Entrepreneurism: The Reinvention of the American Work Ethic in the Twentieth Century*

Dissertation committee: Naomi Oreskes (chair), Elizabeth Lunbeck, James Kloppenberg.

**B.A., Mathematics; Science in Human Culture**, Northwestern University, 2016.

*Summa cum laude*

Honors Thesis: “Ex Africa Semper Aliquid Novi: Consensus and Credibility in HIV Origins Research, 1985-2014.” Supervisor: Steven Epstein.

**ACADEMIC PUBLICATIONS:**

Baker, Erik. “Book Review: Naomi Beck, *Hayek and the Evolution of Capitalism*.” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 55, no. 4 (October 2019): 359-361.

Dauphas, Nicolas, Michael Y. Hu, **Erik M. Baker, et al.** “SciPhon: a Data Analysis Software for Nuclear Resonant Inelastic X-ray Scattering with Applications to Fe, Kr, Sn, Eu and Dy,” *Journal of Synchrotron Radiation* 25, pt. 5 (September 2018): 1581–1599.

**Baker, Erik** and Naomi Oreskes. “Science as a Game, Marketplace or Both: A Reply to Steve Fuller.” *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* 6, no. 9 (2017): 65-69.

**Baker, Erik** and Naomi Oreskes. “It’s No Game: Post-Truth and the Obligations of Science Studies,” *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* 6, no. 8 (2017): 1-10.

**OTHER PUBLICATIONS OF NOTE:**

Baker, Erik. “Why the Alt-Right Loves Nietzsche.” *Jacobin* (January 2, 2019).

## **PRESENTATIONS:**

“Access to Tools: Stewart Brand and the Countercultural Work Ethic,” Lost Alternatives of the Long 1960s: Reflections on the Ideas of the “Counterculture,” workshop (Princeton University, Princeton, NJ), September 28, 2019

“The Other Neoliberals: Joseph Schumpeter and U.S. Social Science in the Early Twentieth Century,” 51st Annual Meeting of Cheiron: International Society for the History of the Behavioral and Social Sciences (McEwan University, Edmonton AB, CA), June 21, 2019

“Privatizing the Future: Neo-Optimism, Philanthrocapitalism, and the End of History,” Grappling with the Futures Symposium (Harvard University and Boston University Boston MA), April 30, 2018.

“Crowdsourcing Justice: Police Body Cameras as a Neoliberal Technology,” Modern Sciences Working Group (Harvard University, Cambridge MA), March 8, 2017.

## **HONORS AND AWARDS:**

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| Certificate of Distinction in Teaching (Harvard University)  | Spring 2019 |
| GSAS Summer Language Fellowship (Harvard University)   | 2017        |
| Undergraduate Research and Arts Exposition, best overall oral presentation (Northwestern University) | 2016        |
| Science in Human Culture Essay Prize (Northwestern University)                                       | 2016        |
| Phi Beta Kappa (Northwestern University Chapter)   | 2015        |
| Summer Undergraduate Research Grant (Northwestern University)  | 2015        |

## **REFERENCES:**

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