



The Last of the Imperious Rich: Lehman Brothers, 1844-2008

Peter Chapman

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On September 11, 1844, Henry Lehman arrived in New York City on a boat from Germany. Soon after, he moved to Montgomery, Alabama, where he and his brother Emanuel established a modest cotton brokering firm that would come to be called Lehman Brothers.

On September 15, 2008, Dick Fuld, the last CEO of Lehman Brothers, filed for corporate bankruptcy amid one of the worst financial crises in American history. After 164 years, one of the largest and most respected investment banks in the world was gone, leaving everyone wondering, "How could this have happened?"

Peter Chapman, an editor and writer for *The Financial Times*, answers this question by exploring the complete history of Lehman Brothers between those two historic Septembers. He takes us back to its early days as a cotton broker in Alabama, and then to its glory days as one of the leading corporate financiers in America. He also provides an intimate portrait of the people who ran Lehman over the decades—from Henry Lehman, the founder, to Bobbie Lehman, who led the company into the world of radio, motion pictures, and air travel in first part of the 20th century, to Dick Fuld, who allowed it to morph into a dealer of shoddy securities.

Throughout his account of this imperiously rich firm, Chapman examines the impact Lehman Brothers had not only on American finance but also on American life. As a major backer of companies like Pan American Airlines, Macy's, and RKO, Lehman helped lead the country into major new industries and helped support some of its most intrepid entrepreneurs.

He then shows how, starting in the 1980s, Lehman's increased focus on short-term gain investments led the firm down the dangerous path that would eventually lead to its demise.

In the end, the story of Lehman Brothers is not only the story of a truly important American company but a cautionary tale of what happens when leaders lose sight of their core mission in their quest for something too good to be true.



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