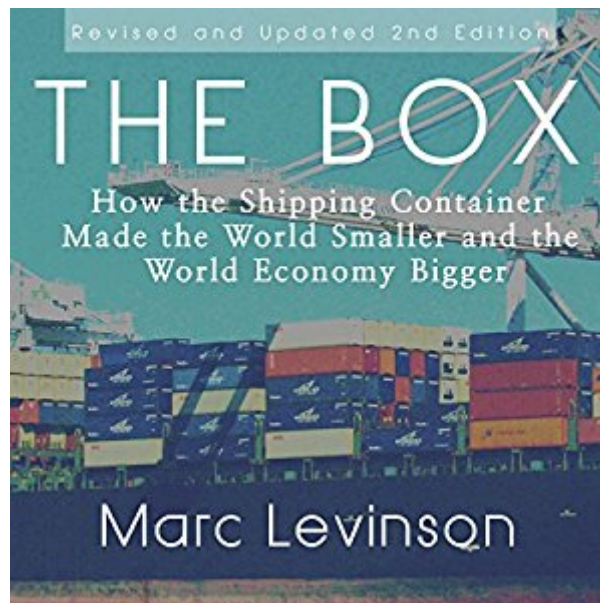




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The Box: How The Shipping Container Made The World Smaller And The World Economy Bigger



Synopsis

In April 1956, a refitted oil tanker carried 58 shipping containers from Newark to Houston. From that modest beginning, container shipping developed into a huge industry that made the boom in global trade possible. *The Box* tells the dramatic story of the container's creation, the decade of struggle before it was widely adopted, and the sweeping economic consequences of the sharp fall in transportation costs that containerization brought about. Published on the 50th anniversary of the first container voyage, this is the first comprehensive history of the shipping container. It recounts how the drive and imagination of an iconoclastic entrepreneur, Malcom McLean, turned containerization from an impractical idea into a massive industry that slashed the cost of transporting goods around the world and made the boom in global trade possible. But the container didn't just happen. Its adoption required huge sums of money, both from private investors and from ports that aspired to be on the leading edge of a new technology. It required years of high-stakes bargaining with two of the titans of organized labor, Harry Bridges and Teddy Gleason, as well as delicate negotiations on standards that made it possible for almost any container to travel on any truck or train or ship. Ultimately, it took McLean's success in supplying U.S. forces in Vietnam to persuade the world of the container's potential. Drawing on previously neglected sources, economist Marc Levinson shows how the container transformed economic geography, devastating traditional ports such as New York and London and fueling the growth of previously obscure ones, such as Oakland. By making shipping so cheap that industry could locate factories far from its customers, the container paved the way for Asia to become the world's workshop and brought consumers a previously unimaginable variety of low-cost products from around the globe.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

OUTSTANDING! This book discusses everything about the origin, development, and consequences of the shipping container box. It discusses it's early attempts in the 1920s through the 1950s, it's revolutionary development by Malcom McLane in the 1950s and 1960s, and the world - wide economic and social consequences. It gives a thorough presentation of how some long - established ports such as the London east end, the New York Manhattan and Brooklyn docks, and the port of Liverpool died while ports that were insignificant in 1960 such as Singapore, Shanghai, and Busan evolved into today's mega ports. Not surprisingly, the ports that died did so as a combination of geography, incredible union recalcitrance and stupidity, poor government decisions, and business short - sightedness. There is also extensive discussion and analysis of the international economic consequences of the vastly lowered international shipping costs. One interesting point that the author makes that I found most interesting: it wasn't US (or any country's) import tariffs that really protected national industries and manufacturers from foreign competition from countries such as Japan, China, and South Korea. It was the relatively high cost of ocean shipping that protected them. Once international shipping costs fell drastically, US industry was almost immediately subjected to competition that it had never encountered before.

I enjoy "how stuff works" books and this one delivered! Container shipping is a business-to-business technology. Few consumers have ever directly sent or received a TEU container. Thus, one of the transformative technologies of the 20th century has gotten relatively little public attention. The technology itself is straightforward: put a lot of cargo in a large box (20 feet or 40 feet long), seal the box, move the box over the world transportation network (ships, railroads, and trucks), and then un-pack the box at the far end. Among other things, this system cuts down on shrinkage from theft. The business side is more complicated. Somebody had to design ships that could carry boxes more efficiently. Somebody had to persuade ports to install new container-handling systems. Somebody had to tell a lot of dock workers that their services were no longer needed. In the end, most of the lower costs flowed through to shippers rather than the companies offering shipping services. That's a good thing. Levinson's book covers this revolution from several angles. On the down-side, there is no central heart to the book; the closest he comes is following the career of Malcom McLean, although even that narrative thread is interrupted often. On the up-side, the book

is meticulously sourced, with many references to original documents from ports in New York City and the San Francisco Bay Area.

I found 'The Box' was absolutely fascinating. The story of the shipping container may have been largely ignored, but it explains so much about the onset of globalisation in late 20th century. Until the mid 1960s, ocean freight was transported in breakbulk ships; the cargo manually jammed into the ships' holds by teams of longshoremen. The process was laborious and time consuming. Major port cities like New York and London were structured around their docks, with factories near their ports to minimise the costs involved with the multiple handling and warehousing involved in transporting goods. Then, a few pioneers started trying to move freight in containers. Within a few short decades, containers revolutionised world trade. Containers of goods could be seamlessly moved from a factory, between trucks, trains, and ships to customers. Where once it may have taken months to ship a product from the US to Europe, it can now take less than a week. Global trade skyrocketed! Nobody predicted the enormous impact that containers were to have on the global economy. Once, firms concentrated their factories in one location to minimise transport costs. With the advent of fast, cheap and reliable container shipping, component manufacture was farmed out around the world to the cheapest supplier. The structures of port cities changed drastically, with whole longshore communities being destroyed, and factories moving to where land was cheap. Of course, countries in Asia soon became major manufacturing powers.

What a great story! It's hard to appreciate how this boring, ubiquitous thing - the shipping container rapidly crept into every facet of our lives. These things are relatively new but they're everywhere. Levinson's book shows you how the container was developed, how it spread, and what it's used for. You'll learn about the early pioneers and the companies they spawned, some of which are still around. Just as fascinating, Levinson describes the world before "the box" - you'll be surprised how different transportation was in the recent past. There's no moralizing here, he just presents the facts in an objective way and lets you see the world as it is. Levinson comes across as genuinely interested in the subject and it rubs off on the reader. This is a book I've lent to friends as "you've got to read this". Everyone enjoys it. If you are a fan of human ingenuity or the history of engineering, international commerce, shipping, etc, you'll enjoy this book too.

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