

MERGER ANTITRUST LAW

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Georgetown University Law Center
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Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3:00-5:00 pm
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READING GUIDANCE

Class 1 (September 1): Introduction to Merger Antitrust Law: Substance and Process (Unit 1)¹

Welcome again to the course. Links to the required reading and the class notes for the first class are embedded in this note and also may be found on Canvas and on the [Merger Antitrust Law](http://www.appliedantitrust.com) page of [AppliedAntitrust.com](http://www.appliedantitrust.com). This memorandum gives you my thoughts on how you should approach these materials.

There are two types of reading in this course. *Reading materials* for the most part will be primary source material. *Class notes* are outlines in PowerPoint that cover topical areas in the course. Class notes will often cover more than we will have the time to discuss in class. You are responsible for everything in the class notes (except any sections marked “optional”) whether we cover it in class or not.

Federal merger antitrust statutes. The [Unit 1 reading materials](#) start with the major substantive provisions of the federal antitrust statutes that regulate mergers and acquisitions (pp. 5-6). Obviously, the language of the statutes that create the antitrust violations are fundamental to this course and you should read them with care. If you are used to reading modern statutes, you should find the form of the federal antitrust statutes quite interesting. The antitrust statutes enable one of the country’s most significant types of economic regulation, yet instead of taking hundreds if not thousands of pages of text as do many modern statutes the substantive provisions of the antitrust laws take a little more than a page. You might also note that on their face they do not give you a clue about what conduct or transactions are prohibited.

The next group of statutes creates the governmental and private causes of action to enforce the federal antitrust laws (pp. 6-9). A cause of action enables the plaintiff to bring its claims for adjudication to a federal court and empowers the court to adjudicate the claims and provide sanctions or relief. As you will see as we go through the course, we will focus on procedure as much as substantive law and economics. It is important that you get a general sense of these procedural provisions now, but you can leave a more detailed understanding of them until we return to take up merger antitrust litigation in Class 4.

I should note that the federal antitrust laws do not preempt state antitrust laws, and many—but not all—states have enacted their own antitrust statutes that apply to mergers. The substantive provisions of these state statutes, however, are not more restrictive than Section 7 of the Clayton Act, which is the principal federal merger antitrust statute, and states challenge transactions in

¹ Like most antitrust lawyers, I use the term “mergers” loosely to mean all types of formal structural combinations and includes, for example, mergers under state law, asset acquisitions, stock acquisitions, and structural joint ventures where the joint venture partners integrate some of their businesses or assets. The formal structure of a combination is rarely important in assessing the legality of the combination under the merger antitrust laws.

federal court under Section 7. As a result, there is no need to cover state merger antitrust law separately.

The institutional setting. After reading the statutes, I would read slides 3-17 of the [Unit 1 class notes](#) on the institutions of antitrust law enforcement in general and merger antitrust law enforcement in particular. An understanding of this setting is critical to the practice of merger antitrust law.

DOJ/FTC merger review process. The Antitrust Division of the Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission review large mergers and acquisitions under the Hart-Scott-Rodino Act (pp. 10-11 of the reading materials and slides 18-21 of the class notes). We will explore this process in much more detail in Class 3, but it is important to be aware of the basics of the process now.

Goals of merger antitrust law. As noted above, the language of the antitrust statutes does not give much insight into what conduct might violate the law. This has been an intentional feature of the antitrust laws since the Sherman Act was passed in 1890. On numerous occasions, the supporters of the Sherman bill assured the Senate and the House of Representatives that they were merely seeking to enable federal courts to apply the common law to anticompetitive business activities.² The framers of the Sherman Act found the common law approach appealing both because it provided a body of law familiar to courts and lawyers that they could immediately apply (although there was some dispute over some of the details) *and* because the law could be continuously adjusted by the courts using the common law process to cope with emerging new business practices as well as changes in the political conception of what the antitrust laws are supposed to accomplish.

This common law approach is fundamental to U.S. antitrust law. The excerpt from the Baxter article (pp. 13-26) develops this idea and is an easy read. From a practical perspective, the common law approach to antitrust law invites enforcement officials, private plaintiffs, and defendants to make arguments to the courts that they should abolish or reformulate some then-existing judicially created antitrust rule or statutory interpretation or create a new one. For example, prosecutors may argue that Section 7 should be interpreted to extend the law to make unlawful some transactions that do not appear to violate the existing interpretations of the statute, while defense lawyers may argue that the interpretation of Section 7 should be limited so that a transaction apparently unlawful under the existing precedent should be found to be lawful. No other area of federal statutory law permits the courts greater flexibility to change the law without the intervention of Congress.

Merger antitrust law has evolved enormously since 1890 (slides 22-38). You do not need to study the slides in depth, but try to get a sense of how merger antitrust law has evolved over time. The required reading deserves more careful attention. The excerpt from the Supreme Court's 1950 *Brown Shoe* opinion (pp. 27-30) introduced a conception of the merger antitrust laws as preventing increases in industrial concentration, protecting small businesses, and preserving local control of business. This conception governed merger antitrust law and enforcement until the early 1970s, when a new conception began to emerge that sought to make mergers unlawful only when they impaired economic efficiency or decreased consumer welfare.

² See, e.g., 20 CONG. REC. 1167 (Jan. 25, 1889), 21 CONG. REC. 2456, 2457, 2561, 2563 (Mar. 21, 1890) (remarks of Sen. John Sherman (R. Ohio)); *id.* at 3146, 3152 (Apr. 8, 1890) (remarks of Sen. George F. Hoar (R., Mass.)).

In merger antitrust law, the first systematic government articulation of this new view was in the introduction to the DOJ's 1982 Merger Guidelines (pp. 33-34), which were written under Baxter's direction.³ Over the next ten years and without the intervention of Congress, the courts gradually recognized efficiency and consumer welfare as the goals of antitrust law and reinterpreted the law accordingly. The view remains intact today, as reflected in Section 1 of the DOJ/FTC 2010 Horizontal Merger Guidelines (pp. 35-37).

We will spend much of the course examining rules that derive from this efficiency/consumer welfare perspective as well as arguments to change some rules or apply new economic tools to develop and promote efficiency and consumer welfare. For that reason, the slides on the public policy behind the consumer welfare standard are important (slides 39-43). If you have not encountered demand curve diagrams, do not worry about it. We will go over these slides in some detail in class. Better yet, if you are not familiar with the concepts of demand curves, consumer surplus, or deadweight loss, take a look at the following short YouTube videos: Marginal Revolution University, [The Demand Curve](#); Marginal Revolution University, [A Deeper Look at the Demand Curve](#); and Marginal Revolution University, [What Is Deadweight Loss?](#) In general, when you run into an economics concept you do not understand, you should look for an explanation on the Internet.

The modern critiques. The consumer welfare standard has come under attack in the last several years. The *progressive critique* accepts efficiency and consumer welfare as appropriate goals but argues that the courts and antitrust enforcement agencies have failed to apply antitrust law sufficiently aggressively to advance these goals. The *populist critique* holds that efficiency and consumer welfare need to be relegated to being only two of the goals of antitrust law, that other goals—including eliminating structural monopolies, giving weight to the interests of other stakeholders in addition to consumers (most notably labor), and promoting the “competitive process” even when the conduct in questions does not have a demonstrable adverse effect on efficiency or consumer welfare—need to be included and that current antitrust rules need to be accordingly refashioned.

I have included in the reading two pieces from Sen. Elizabeth Warren, one of the leading advocates today for reform of the antitrust laws (pp. 39-54), as well as a short article from Lina Khan, a leader in the populist reform movement, summarizing that critique. In addition, Sen. Amy Klobuchar introduced legislation to reform Section 7 of the Clayton Act in 2017 (S.1812) and reintroduced the same legislation in January 2019 for the 116th Congress (S.307). Read Sen. Klobuchar's remarks introducing her legislation on the Senate floor (pp. 57-59) as well as Sections 1-3 of S.307. The chances of passage in this Congress is essentially zero, but if the next time the Democrats have control of the House, Senate, and the Presidency something like S.307 could well become law. Feel free to skim these materials or skip them altogether.

The TransDigm/Takata case study. The final section of the required reading is our first case study. This consists of the news release announcing TransDigm's pending acquisition of Taketa's aerospace business, the DOJ's complaint challenging this acquisition, and a news release reporting on the subsequent divestiture of the acquired assets to management (pp. 39-97). These materials are also the basis for the Class 1 homework assignment. We will spend most of

³ The Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission have issued “merger guidelines” to inform the business community and the bar of how they would exercise their prosecutorial discretion in assessing whether to challenge transactions. We will look at the 2010 Merger Guidelines in Class 2.

the first class on Tuesday discussing the homework assignment and the challenge to the transaction more generally.⁴ Be sure to bring a copy of the *TransDigm* complaint to class.

As you read the TransDigm/Takata case study, think about the following questions (not all of which are answered in the materials but all of which we will address in class):

1. What is the transaction in issue?
2. Who is the buyer?
3. Who is the seller?
4. Who is the target?
5. Is this a horizontal, vertical, or conglomerate transaction?
6. Why did the buyer want to buy?
7. Why did the seller want to sell?
8. What antitrust statute(s) does the complaint apply to this transaction?
9. What other antitrust statute(s) could the transaction implicate?
10. What are the elements of a prima face case of a Section 7 violation?
11. What is the public policy concern animating Section 7?
12. What were the particular concerns about this transaction?
13. Who is the plaintiff in this case?
14. What gives this plaintiff a right of action to bring the case?
15. Who is the defendant in the case?
16. Was this transaction challenged prior to or after consummation?
17. When did the transaction close?
18. What relief is the plaintiff seeking?
19. Could the DOJ have sought other types of relief?
20. Who else could have brought a Section 7 challenge against the transaction and what kinds of relief could these other plaintiffs seek?
21. How did the DOJ find out about this transaction?
22. Why didn't the DOJ learn about the transaction through an HSR filing?
23. What did the DOJ do after it learned about the transaction?
24. In which court was the action brought?
25. What was the gravamen of the complaint?

⁴ Reading the materials and preparing for class is mandatory; the submission of a written homework response this week is not (next week it will be mandatory). That said, you will get much more out of class on Tuesday if you write up your answer to the homework assignment, even if you do not submit it to me.

26. What were the alleged relevant geographic market(s)?
27. What is the purpose of defining relevant markets in merger antitrust cases?
28. What happened as a result of the DOJ's investigation and complaint?

If you have any questions or comments, send me an e-mail. I look forward to seeing you in class on Zoom on Tuesday, September 1.

Dale Collins