



Introduction to Economic History

Economics 210A
Spring 2020
Wednesday 1:10-2:59 p.m.
648 Evans Hall

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Syllabus and Reading List

Economics 210a is required of students in the first year of the Ph.D. program. The course is designed to introduce a selection of themes from the economic history literature (not to present a narrative account of world economic history). Emphasis is on the insights that history can provide to the practicing economist.

Class meetings consist of a mixture of lecture and discussion. Because discussion will focus on issues raised by the assigned readings, readings should be completed before class.

Your grade will be based 50 percent on weekly memos due at the beginning of each class, and 50 percent on the research paper. Extra credit will be given for informed classroom discussion.

Weekly Memos

After the first week, a memo on each week's readings is due, submitted on the course's bCourses website, at 5 pm the the day before the class in which those readings are discussed. You will find the memo questions on the bCourses site. Typically the week's question will be posted on Thursday, five days before the class when your memo is due.

Your memos should be about 300 words, and certainly no more than 600 words. They cannot be exhaustive or provide definitive answers. But they can explain why a question is important, and they can draw on assigned readings to answer it.

Research Paper

Papers are due on Friday, May 10 by 5 pm. Please upload your paper as a pdf file to the Economics 210a bCourses page. The paper should not exceed 5000 words.

The submission process involves three benchmarks. You should discuss your paper topic during office hours during the first month of the semester, before March 1. You should submit a brief paper prospectus before spring break: 5:00 PM Friday, March 20: again, upload your prospectus and paper to the Economics 210a bCourses page; the prospectus should explain why the topic is important, present your hypothesis, describe the materials, and detail the approach that will be used to analyze it. You should give a short presentation on your paper-in-progress to the class during one of the April class meetings.

Your paper should provide new evidence and analysis of a topic in economic history. You should use the tools of economics to pose and answer as best you can a historical question. The paper should have historical substance. This is not a requirement in applied economics or econometrics that can be satisfied by relabeling the variables in theoretical models taught elsewhere or just by applying new statistical techniques to heavily-worked data.

Topic: The paper can cover any topic in economic history. The only requirement is that the topic must genuinely involve the past. What is the economic past? One answer is a period when the economic environment was significantly different from today. You must make the case. Comparisons of past and current events are fine, but heavy focus on current events is likely to be problematic.

Historical Evidence: Historical evidence comes in many forms. The evidence could be a list of goods traded or a statement by government officials of what they were trying to accomplish. Economic historians sometimes use econometrics, although tables and graphs displaying important variables can be enough to make a compelling argument.

Successful Topics from Previous Years: Your graduate career (indeed your entire career) will depend on your success at identifying interesting questions. For this reason, we will not give you a list of topics. Instead, we mention here, by way of illustration, examples of topics and suggestions of ways of finding similarly successful topics.

The easiest paper to write is a critique of an existing paper. Is there selection bias? Has the author omitted a key variable? One student noticed a footnote in a paper that said one observation had been left out of the figure because it was large relative to the others, but that this same extreme observation was included in the empirical analysis. The student got the data and showed that the published results depended crucially on this one observation.

Few events have no historical antecedents. If there is a modern development you are interested in, you could look for its historical roots or counterparts. For example, much has been written about the advent of the Internet. How do its development and impact compare to those of the telegraph? The telephone? Radio? Television?

Have you come across an unusual source in the library? Is there an interesting question that this source could be used to answer? One student came across the catalogs for the 1851 World's Fair. She had the idea that these descriptions of what each country exhibited could be used as a measure of innovation. She wrote a paper looking at the industrial composition of innovation across countries. Another student was browsing newspapers from San Francisco in the 1870s. He found classified ads that read something like: "Wanted—man to work in store and loan store \$1000." This student wondered why companies would tie employment and loans. He wrote a paper investigating whether ads such as these were a sign of credit market imperfections or a way of ensuring worker loyalty and honesty.

You might take a hypothesis in the historical literature and suggest a new way of testing it. An example of this type of paper involves the debate over how business cycles have changed over time. One researcher suggested that instead of attempting to parse the implications of very imperfect estimates of real GDP, one could look at stock prices as an indicator of the volatility of the macroeconomy.

History is full of natural experiments: borders are redrawn, a war is fought, new regulation is imposed. Often such experiments can be used to answer important questions in economics—for example, what the changing speed with which liberty ships were built during World War II tells us about the extent of learning by doing.

Some very good papers from past years can be found here: <https://delong.typepad.com/teaching_economics/model-economic-history-papers.html>

Readings Week-by-Week

January 22 A. The Usefulness[?] of Economic History

Robert M. Solow (1985): *Economic History and Economics* <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1805620>>

Kenneth J. Arrow (1985): *Maine and Texas* <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1805618>>

Paul Krugman (2011): *Mr. Keynes and the Moderns* <<https://voxeu.org/article/mr-keynes-and-moderns>>

Carl Shapiro and Hal Varian (1999): *Information Rules: A Strategic Guide to the Network Economy*, selections <<https://delong.typepad.com/files/shapiro-variation-rules-selections.pdf>>

January 22 B. Malthusian Economies

Jared Diamond (1987): *The Worst Mistake in the History of the Human Race* <<http://discovermagazine.com/1987/may/02-the-worst-mistake-in-the-history-of-the-human-race>>

Richard Steckel (2008): *Biological Measures of the Standard of Living* <<http://www.aeaweb.org/articles.php?doi=10.1257/jep.22.1.129>>

Gregory Clark (2005): *The Condition of the Working Class in England, 1209–2004* <www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/10.1086/.pdf>

January 29 A. Technology and Organization in the Very Long Run

Moses Finley (1965): *Technical Innovation and Economic Progress in the Ancient World* <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2591872>>

Michael Kremer (1993): *Population Growth and Technological Change: One Million B.C. to 1990* <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2118405>>

Charles Jones (1995): *R&D-Based Models of Economic Growth* <<https://delong.typepad.com/files/jones-r--d.pdf>>

January 29 B. Commercial Revolutions?

Jeremiah E. Dittmar (2011): *Information Technology and Economic Change: The Impact*

of the Printing Press <<http://qje.oxfordjournals.org/content/126/3/1133.abstract>>

J. Bradford DeLong and Andrei Shleifer (1993): *Princes and Merchants: European City Growth before the Industrial Revolution* <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/725804>>

Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, and James Robinson (2005): *The Rise of Europe: Atlantic Trade, Institutional Change, and Economic Growth* <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4132729>>

February 5 A. The Industrial Revolution

Robert C. Allen (2011): *Why the Industrial Revolution Was British: Commerce, Induced Invention and the Scientific Revolution* <<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1468-0289.2010.00532.x/pdf>>

Peter Temin (1997): *Two Views of the British Industrial Revolution* <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/2951107.pdf>>

Stephen Nicholas and Richard H. Steckel (1991): *Heights and Living Standards of English Workers during the Early Years of Industrialization, 1770–1815* <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/2123399.pdf>>

February 5 B Modern Economic Growth

William D. Nordhaus (1997): *Do Real-Output and Real-Wage Measures Capture Reality? The History of Lighting Suggests Not* <<http://www.nber.org/chapters/c6064>>

Robert Gordon (2000): *Interpreting the “One Big Wave” in Long-Term Productivity Growth* <<https://www.nber.org/papers/w7752.pdf>>

Peter Thompson (2001): *How Much Did the Liberty Shipbuilders Learn? New Evidence for an Old Case Study* <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/10.1086/318605.pdf>>

February 12 A. Comparative Development and Underdevelopment

Karl Marx (1853): *The Future Results of British Rule in India* <<http://tinyurl.com/dl20090112l>>

W. Arthur Lewis (1978): *Evolution of the International Economic Order* <<https://delong.typepad.com/sdj/2008/04/w-arthur-lewis.html>>

Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, and James A. Robinson (2001): *The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development: An Empirical Investigation* <<https://economics.mit.edu/>>

[files/4123>](#)

February 12 B. American Exceptionalism

Kenneth Sokoloff (1984): *Was the Transition from the Artisanal Shop to the Non-Mechanized Factory Associated with Gains in Efficiency?* <<http://www.nber.org/papers/w1386>>

Daniel Gross (2017): *Scale versus Scope in the Diffusion of New Technology: Evidence from the Tractor* <<https://www.nber.org/papers/w24125>>

Dave Donaldson and Richard Hornbeck (2016): *Railroads and American Economic Growth: A 'Market Access' Approach* <<https://academic.oup.com/qje/article/131/2/799/2606976>>

February 19 A. Unfreedom

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1848): *Manifesto of the Communist Party* <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/>>

Stanley Engerman and Kenneth Sokoloff (1994): *Factor Endowments, Institutions and Differential Paths of Development among New World Economies* <<http://papers.nber.org/papers/h0066>>

Nathan Nunn (2008): *The Long-Term Effects of Africa's Slave Trades* <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/25098896.pdf>>

February 19 B. Inequality

Branko Milanovic, Peter H. Lindert, and Jeffrey G. Williamson (2010): *Pre-Industrial Inequality* <<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1468-0297.2010.02403.x/abstract>>

Thomas Piketty and Gabriel Zucman (2014): *Capital Is Back: Wealth-Income Ratios in Rich Countries 1700–2010* <<http://qje.oxfordjournals.org/content/129/3/1255.full.pdf>>

February 26 A. Labor Markets

Claudia Goldin and Kenneth Sokoloff (1984): *The Relative Productivity Hypothesis of Industrialization: The American Case, 1820 to 1850* <<http://qje.oxfordjournals.org/content/99/3/461.short>>

Joshua Rosenbloom (2018): *Antebellum Labor Markets* <<https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/>>

[econ_workingpapers/42/>](#)

February 26 B. Women and Children

Abigail Smith Adams (1776): *Letter to John Adams 31 March - 5 April 1776* <<https://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/archive/doc?id=L17760331aa>>

Martha Bailey (2013): *Fifty Years of Family Planning: New Evidence on the Long-Run Effects of Increasing Access to Contraception* <<http://www.nber.org/papers/w19493>>

Claudia Goldin (1991): *The Role of World War II in the Rise of Women's Employment* <<http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/649603>>

Heather Antecol, Kelly Bedard, and Jenna Stearns (2018): *Equal but Inequitable: Who Benefits from Gender-Neutral Tenure Clock Stopping Policies* <<https://pubs.aeaweb.org/doi/pdf/10.1257/aer.20160613>>

March 4 A. Capital Markets

Naomi Lamoreaux (1986): *Banks, Kinship, and Economic Development: The New England Case* <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2121478>>

Jeremy Edwards and Sheilagh Ogilvie (1996): *Universal Banks and German Industrialization: A Reappraisal* <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2597758>>

March 4 B. International Money and Finance

Michael Bordo and Hugh Rockoff (1996): *The Gold Standard as a 'Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval* <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2123971?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents>

Warren Weber (2016): *A Bitcoin Standard: Lessons from the Gold Standard* <<http://www.bankofcanada.ca/2016/03/staff-working-paper-2016-14/>>

March 11 A. The Post-1914 Breakdown

John Maynard Keynes (1919): *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, selections chs. 1-4 <<https://delong.typepad.com/files/keynes-peace.pdf>>

John Maynard Keynes (1925): *The Economic Consequences of Mr. Churchill* <https://gutenberg.ca/ebooks/keynes-essaysinpersuasion/keynes-essaysinpersuasion-00-h.html#Economic_Consequences>

March 18 B. Origins of the Great Depression

Gary Richardson and William Troost (2009): *Monetary Intervention Mitigated Banking Panics during the Great Depression: Quasi-Experimental Evidence from the Federal Reserve District Border in Mississippi, 1929 to 1933* <<http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/649603>>

Ben Bernanke (1995): *The Macroeconomics of the Great Depression: A Comparative Approach* <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/i336266>>

April 1 A. Recovery from the Great Depression

Christina Romer (1992): *What Ended the Great Depression?* <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2123226>>

Gauti Eggertsson (2008): *Great Expectations and the End of the Great Depression* <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/29730131>>

Joshua Hausman (2016): *Fiscal Policy and Economic Recovery: The Case of the 1936 Veterans' Bonus* <<https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/aer.20130957>>

April 1 B. Papers-in-Progress Presentations

April 8 A. Race and Southern Regional Recovery

Gavin Wright (1987): *The Economic Revolution in the American South* <<https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/jep.1.1.161>>

Taylor Jaworski (2017): *World War II and the Industrialization of the American South* <<http://www.nber.org/papers/w23477>>

Ellora Derenocourt (2018): *Can You Move to Opportunity? Evidence from the Great Migration* <<https://scholar.harvard.edu/elloraderenocourt/publications>>

April 8 B. Papers-in-Progress Presentations

April 15 A. The Great Compression

Claudia Goldin and Robert Margo (1992): *The Great Compression: The U.S. Wage Structure at Midcentury* <<https://academic.oup.com/qje/article/107/1/1/1925779>>

Claudia Goldin (2001): *The Human-Capital Century and American Leadership: Virtues of the Past* <<http://www.nber.org/papers/w8239>>

April 15 B. Papers-in-Progress Presentations

April 22 A. Convergence and Its Absence

Lant Pritchett (1997): *Divergence*, *Big Time Journal of Economic Perspectives* (Summer), pp. 3-17, <<http://tinyurl.com/dl20090112o>>

Dev Patel, Justin Sandefur, and Arvind Subramanian (2018): *Everything You Know about Cross-Country Convergence Is (Now) Wrong* <<https://www.piie.com/blogs/realtime-economic-issues-watch/everything-you-know-about-cross-country-convergence-now-wrong>>

Paul Johnson and Chris Papageorgiou: *What Remains of Cross-Country Convergence?* <<https://delong.typepad.com/files/johnson-papageorgiou.pdf>>

April 22 B. Papers-in-Progress Presentations

April 29 A. Growth Speedups and Slowdowns

Nicholas Crafts (2002): *The Solow Productivity Paradox in Historical Perspective* <<http://www.cepr.org/pubs/dps/DP3142.asp>>

Dani Rodrik (1995): *Getting Interventions Right: How South Korea and Taiwan Grew Rich* <<http://tinyurl.com/dl20090112t>>

Peter J. Klenow and Andres Rodriguez-Clare (1997): *The Neoclassical Revival in Growth Economics: Has It Gone too Far?* <<https://delong.typepad.com/klenow-rodriquez-clare.pdf>>

April 29 B. Conclusion and Review

Memo: Papers that got cut from the reading list in the final pruning exercise

Alberto Alesina, Paola Giuliano, and Nathan Nunn (2013), “On the Origins of Gender Roles: Women and the Plough.” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 128 (May), pp. 469–530. https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/nunn/files/alesina_giuliano_nunn_qje_2013.pdf

Stephen Broadberry (2013), “Accounting for the Great Divergence,” unpublished manuscript, London School of Economics, <http://www.lse.ac.uk/economicHistory/workingPapers/2013/WP184.pdf>

Nico Voigtländer and Hans-Joachim Voth (2013), “The Three Horsemen of Riches: Plague, War, and Urbanization in Early Modern Europe,” *Review of Economic Studies* 80 (May), pp. 774–811. <http://restud.oxfordjournals.org/content/80/2/774.full.pdf>

Jeffrey Williamson (1984), “Why Was British Economic Growth So Slow During the Industrial Revolution?” *Journal of Economic History* 44, pp.687-712 <http://www.jstor.org/view/00220507/di975668/97p1230f/0>

Dave Donaldson (2016), “Railroads of the Raj: Estimating the Impact of Transportation Infrastructure,” forthcoming, *American Economic Review*. <http://www.nber.org/papers/w16487.pdf>

Susan Wolcott and Gregory Clark (1999), “Why Nation's Fail: Managerial Decisions and Performance in Indian Cotton Textiles, 1890-1938,” *Journal of Economic History*, June <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0022-0507%28199906%2959%3A2%3C397%3AWNFMDA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-9>

Alfred Chandler (1990), *Scale and Scope: The Dynamics of Industrial Capitalism*, Chapter 3, pp. 47-89. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Suresh Naidu and Noam Yuchtman (2013), “Coercive Contract Enforcement: Law and the Labor Market in Nineteenth Century Industrial Britain,” *American Economic Review* 103 (February), pp.107–144. <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles.php?doi=10.1257/aer.103.1.107>

Claudia Goldin and Lawrence Katz (2008), *The Race between Education and Technology*. Chapter 8, “The Race between Education and Technology.” Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, pp. 287–323.

Jason Long and Joseph Ferrie (2013), “Intergenerational Occupational Mobility in Great Britain and the United States since 1850,” *American Economic Review* 103 (June), pp.1109–1137. https://www.aeaweb.org/atypon.php?return_to=/doi/pdfplus/10.1257/aer.103.4.1109

Eric Hilt (2018), “Banks, Insider Connections and Industrialization in New England: Evidence from the Panic of 1873,” NBER Working Paper no.24792 , <https://www.nber.org/papers/w24792>

Lance E. Davis (1965), “The Investment Market, 1870-1914: The Evolution of a National Market,” *Journal of Economic History* 25, pp. 355-393. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2116175>

Sanford Jacoby (1984), *Employing Bureaucracy: Managers, Unions and the Transformation of Work in American Industry 1900-1945*, Chapters 1 and 2, pp.13-64. New York: Columbia University Press.

Susan Carter and Elizabeth Savoca (1990), “Labor Mobility and Lengthy Jobs in 19th Century America,” *Journal of Economic History* 50, pp. 1-16. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2123435?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

Chenzi Xu (2018), “Reshaping Global Trade: The Immediate and Long-Run Effects of Bank Failures,” unpublished manuscript, Harvard University <https://scholar.harvard.edu/chenzixu/job-market-paper>

Hugh Rockoff (1984), “Some Evidence on the Real Price of Gold, Its Costs of Production and Commodity Prices,” in Michael Bordo and Anna J. Schwartz (eds.), *A Retrospective on the Classical Gold Standard*,” pp. 613-650. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. <http://ideas.repec.org/h/nbr/nberch/11139.html>

Milton Friedman and Anna Schwartz (1963), *A Monetary History of the United States, 1867-1960*,_Chapter 13, pp. 676-700. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

<[https://github.com/braddelong/public-files/blob/master/
Econ%20210a%20Spring%202020%20Syllabus.pdf](https://github.com/braddelong/public-files/blob/master/Econ%20210a%20Spring%202020%20Syllabus.pdf)>