History 159A.
Economic History to the Industrial Revolution.

This course is a survey of economic history from Classical civilizations to the beginnings of industrialization in Britain in the late eighteenth century. The focus will be on developments in Europe, but will introduce comparisons with other areas of the world. Among the major questions to be addressed are: Was (is) economic life bound by Malthusian constraints? Was Europe unique in escaping these constraints? Was there a transition from feudalism to capitalism? How did the first global economy come into being? What can explain the British industrial revolution? What was its significance?

This course is equivalent to Economics 111A. Economics majors may apply the course to their major requirements.

Basic knowledge of economics is helpful, as is a general background in world history, but there are no formal prerequisites for enrollment in this course.

Evaluation will be based on a mid-term examination (20%), a term paper of 7-8 pages to be described later (20%), discussion session participation (20%), and a final exam (40%).

The following is available for purchase:

Jan de Vries, The Economy of Europe in an Age of Crisis, 1600-1750 (Cambridge University Press, 1976). [cited below as: Crisis]

All other assigned readings are assembled in a reader available at Copy Central, 2560 Bancroft.

Reading Assignments:

23 Jan. Introduction: the Big Picture


Gregory Clark, A Farewell to Alms (Princeton University Press, 2007), Ch. 2, pp. 19-39


6-13 Feb. **Origins of the Medieval Economy**


Joel Mokyr, *The Lever of Riches* (Oxford University Press, 1990), Ch. 3-3, pp. 3-56

19- Feb. – 6 March **The Origins of Capitalism.**


Philip D. Curtin, Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex (2nd ed., Cambridge, 1999), Ch. 3, pp. 29-45.

Crisis, Ch 1-3, pp. 1-112.

Mokyr, Lever, Ch. 4, pp. 57-80; Ch. 7, pp. 151-192

11 March Mid-Term Exam

13-20 March Europe in a World Economy: the first age of globalization?

Crisis, Ch 4-8, pp. 113-254.


Persson, An Economic History of Europe, Ch. 5, pp.74-91; ch 7, pp. 129-153.

Ronald Findlay and Kevin O’Rourke, Power and Plenty (Princeton, 2007), Ch. 4-5, pp. 204-262; 286-294; 304-310.

Philip D. Curtin, Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex, Ch. 6, pp. 73-85; Ch 9-10, pp. 113-143.


1 April – 1 May  The Industrial Revolution: The Great Divergence?


Mokyr, Lever, Ch. 5, pp. 81-112.


Findley and O’Rourke, Power and Plenty, Ch 6, pp. 324-364.


Clark, Farewell to Alms, ch.12 - 14, pp. 230-99

22 April  Paper Due

6-8 May  RRR period

17 May  Final Examination, 8-11 am.