This course is intended as a brief introduction to the discipline of economic history. Economic history deals with records bearing on the history of economic life. Just as a physician asks her patient’s family medical history in undertaking diagnosis, so economists concerned with policy need to learn the economic history of the nation whose problems they address. Policy problems emerge in specific historical contexts subject to continuous change, and although general theory can be help resolve them, the timelessness of the logical constructions on which it is based often produces misguided recommendations. Theory analyzes, history synthesizes.

In a broader context, economic history investigates processes through which over the 100,000 years or so of our species’ existence mankind has managed to increase its numbers and its material standard of living, to the point where we haves become a danger to the survival of other species and potentially to ourselves. Needless to say, the subject matter is vast; no one can pretend to master even a small fraction in a lifetime of research and reading. There are nevertheless a few principles that provide markers through what is otherwise a pathless thicket of detail. We will focus on those principles.

In order to provide you an overview on the broad flow of economic history as it is currently represented in the literature, I have organized the course chronologically. This implies emphasis on European economic history, and in lesser measure that of the United States, as the two initial centers of modern economic growth. In the past twenty years a new emerging literature of high quality on the economic history of the rest of the world has emerged and is presently the discipline’s most exciting research frontier. I will not be lecturing on this material, but provide a reference to a massive bibliography for those interested in pursuing deeper study.

The readings have been selected with two purposes in mind. The first is to provide a sampling of significant hypotheses and good work bearing on the topics discussed in the lectures. The second is to provide you entry points to the literature. Of the topics omitted for lack of time, the most important are taxation, financial institutions, and industrial and labour organization since 1850. Another major omission is the economic history of the Soviet Economies to 1989.

The course evaluation will be based on presence, participation, readings (for every session) and (mostly) an essay to be chosen in consultation with me. You are to write a two-age précis (500 to 600 words) of one article per week (due Friday). The essay (20 to 25 pages) can be an original research paper or a critical examination of a major text (or texts) in the literature of economic history. It is due the last day of class.
Syllabus page 2

Lectures

12 March  Introduction: Historiography of Economic History; Scope and Method
13 March  Grand Narratives: Markets and Capitalism; Malthus, Marx, Kuznets, Landes, Gerschenkron, Parker,
March 19  Demography and Economic History:
March 20  Technological Change
March 26  Economic Prehistory and Classical Antiquity
March 27  Medieval Economic Growth and Decline
April  2  Before the Industrial Revolution. The World Economy 1600 to 1750
April  3  The Industrial Revolution in Britain
April  9  European Industrialization to 1914
April 10  American Economic Growth to 1929
April 16  The Great Depression
April 17  Post-War Economic Experience.

Readings

12 March: Introduction


13 March: Grand Narratives

Alexander Gerschenkron, ‘Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective’

19 March: Demography and Economic Change

Symposium on Gregory Clark’s *Farewell to Alms,* *European Review of Economic History* 12 (2008), 137-199. See especially articles by McCloskey and Grantham

March 20: Technological Change


March 26: Economic Prehistory and Classical Antiquity

Pendik Ozdogan, 'The Beginning of the Neolithic economies in southeastern Europe: an Anatolian perspective,' *Journal of European Archaeology* 5 (1997), 1-33. [As this article is difficult to access on line, the following is a good substitute.]
link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-1-4020-8539-0
Jacob Weisdorf, 'Why did the First Farmers toil? Human Metabolism and the Origins of Agriculture,' European Review of Economic History 13 (2009), 157-172
link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-1-4020-8539-0_7 for the other reference to 
George Grantham, ‘Prehistoric Origins of European Economic Integration’

March 27: Medieval Growth and Decline

George Grantham, ‘Integrating Commodities in the Medieval European Economy: Scale, Transport Cost, and the Extent of the Market from Antiquity to the Black Death.’

April 2: Before the Industrial Revolution

Robert C. Allen 'Progress and Poverty in Early Modern Europe,' Economic History Review 56 (2003), 403-443.

April 3: The Industrial Revolution in England


April 9: European Industrialization to 1914

Kevin O’Rourke, 'Tariffs and Growth in the Late Nineteenth Century,’ Economic Journal 110 (2000), 456-83

April 10: American Economic Growth to 1929

Gavin Wright, ‘Slavery and American Economic History,’ Agriculture History 77 (2003), 527-552

April 16: The Great Depression

John Maynard Keynes, General Theory. Chapters 1, 12
John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, chapter 1

April 17: Post-war Economic Experience

Yegor Gaidar, ‘The Collapse of Empire,’ from *Russia. The Long View*