The New Economics of History: Syllabus and Readings

Note: This is a course in economic history. The course will be devoted to recent papers in economic history written in the language and tradition of modern economics. In the past decade, a great deal of economic history has been written by scholars (some full-time economic historians, others part-timers and interlopers) who are applying economic theory and econometric methods to historical issues and have produced and utilized new and innovative databases. The purpose is to survey a sample of this recent literature and stimulate similar research.

After an introductory lecture by me, the course will be student-driven. Each student will be in charge of a number of class presentations of the chapters and papers below (starting with week 2). The readings will be allocated on a first-ask first-serve basis, subject to the constraint that all papers have to be covered and that distribution is about as equitable as is humanly possible. Each student should prepare a powerpoint lecture of about 30-45 minutes on her/his papers, summarizing the most interesting and important findings, while reviewing the methodology and sources used.

All papers and chapters articles have been placed on the blackboard site of this course.

Week 1 (Jan 5): Introduction/Mokyr

Background reading:


Week 2: (Jan. 10 and 12): Long-term Economic growth

Oded Galor, Unified Growth Theory (2011), chs. 1-2 (pp. 1-66) and ch. 5, pp. 140–78


Mayshar, Joram, Moav Omer, and Neeman, Zvika. “Geography, Transparency and Institutions,” working paper.
Week 3: (Jan. 17 and 19): The Great Malthusian Debate


Kelly, Morgan and Ó Gráda, Cormac. “The Preventive Check in Medieval and Pre-industrial England” and “Living Standards and Mortality since the Middle Ages.” Mimeo.


Week 4: Issues in the Early Rise of Europe


Week 5: Economic Problems of the Industrial Revolution


Week 6: Mysteries of Persistence


Week 7: Institutions and the Evolution of Modern Economies


**Week 8: The New Economic History of Culture**

Joel Mokyr, “Culture, Institutions, and Modern Growth,” in Sebastian Galiani and Itai Sened, eds., Institutions, Property Rights, and Economic Growth, forthcoming, 2014 [To be presented by the author, not an item of choice].


**Week 9: Economic Riddles of China’s past**


Sng, Tuan-Hwee. 2009. “Size and Dynastic Decline: The Principal-Agent Problem in Late Imperial China 1700-1850.” Unpublished.

**Week 10: The New Economic History of Africa**


