Economics 323-1: Economic History of the U.S. to 1865

Northwestern University
Department of Economics
Spring, 2020-2021
Time: M-W 9:30-10:50
Location: Online
Instructor: Michele Rosenberg
E-mail: michele.rosenberg@northwestern.edu
Teaching Assistant: Mario Cannella
E-mail: mariocannella2022@u.northwestern.edu
Office Hours: by appointment
www: sites.northwestern.edu/mur1789/

COURSE DESCRIPTION: The course examines the economic and institutional development of the United States from colonial times to the Civil War. It focuses on questions related to differential patterns of development across the Americas and the U.S., devoting specific attention to labor market institutions, its divergence across North and South, and the role of Slavery in the development of the American Economy.

PREREQUISITES: Economics 310-1, 311, and 281, or permission of the instructor.

TEACHING METHOD: Two lectures per week: Monday and Wednesday 9:30-10:50.

EVALUATION METHOD: (1) Group presentation in class of one paper assigned by the instructor; (2) Final paper on a topic chosen in consultation with the instructor. Final grade: presentation 25%, paper proposal 15%, final paper 60%.

FINAL PAPER: Each student will independently write a 10-20 page quantitative paper incorporating significant original research. The paper will describe an issue in U.S. economic history, propose a hypothesis relating to that issue, and provide a quantitative test of that hypothesis. A literature review or qualitative discussion will not be sufficient, but students can expand on work previously done by others scholars, provided that in the process they replicate that previous work while making their own contribution. Students are free to choose any topic dealing with the economic history of
the U.S. through 1865. Topics must be approved by the TA by the end of week 4 (April 22nd). By the end of week 6 (Thursday, May 6th), students will turn in a proposal containing: 1) a one page description of the proposed research; 2) a detailed outline of the entire paper; 3) a tentative bibliography; and 4) some tentative results (a single table will be sufficient). The paper proposals will be graded. On matters of style, consult Strunk and White, The Elements of Style and The Chicago Manual of Style. Any material other than the student’s own original work must be identified with a footnote or endnote. Choose the citation style you prefer, but be sure to properly indicate the sources.

The following websites provide list of data sources available:

- https://eh.net/databases/
- https://www.slavevoyages.org/
- https://gpih.ucdavis.edu/index.html

Both the paper proposal and the final paper are due via Canvas in PDF.

Days: Topics have to be approved by April 22nd, 12 noon (CET). Paper proposal is due on May 6th, 12 noon (CET). Final paper is due on June 8th, 12 noon (CET).

READINGS: All reading material is provided on the Canvas website.

PRESENTATION: Students will be assigned papers to present among the ones indicated with a (*). The allocation will be decided before the first class on March 30th. Presentations will take place each Wednesday, starting from Week 2. Evaluations will be based on the following criteria: clarity of exposition, understanding of the material discussed in class, and time management. When assigned to a paper, the group will receive an indication of the time the presentation will last. Each group member will present an equal amount of time and divide the presentation material accordingly.

On empirical and theoretical papers: A complete understanding of the models and empirical specifications is not expected. Good command of the main concepts and the ability to relate to general questions discussed in class is required. The presentation will account for 25% of the grade — 15% for the overall quality of the presentation and 10% for the individual presentation. Any software for presentation can be used. The presentation will be submitted by 12 midnight the day before the presentation. Upload the presentation on the Canvas of the group in PDF.

TIME TABLE:

- **Week 1 (March, 30)** First Meeting: Organization and Overview of the Syllabus
- **Week 1 (March, 31)** Economic History and Comparative Development
Wright G. “Quantitative Economic History in the U.S.” (Unpublished)
McCloskey D. “Does the past have useful economics?” Journal of Economic Literature (1976)

- **Week 2 (April, 5-7)** Initial Conditions and Key Economic Forces
  - **Presentations:**

- **Week 3 (April, 12-14)** The Problem of Labor in Colonial America
  - **Presentations:**
    - Menard, “From Servant to Freeholder: Status Mobility and Property Accumulation in Seventeenth-Century Maryland,” The William and Mary Quarterly (1973)

• **Week 4 (April, 19-21)** Institutional Divergence North vs. South and Agricultural Development

  **Presentations:**

• **Topics approved by April 22**

• **Week 5 (April, 26-28)** Early Industrialization and Technological Adoption and Growth

  **Presentations:**
  * Atack, “Industrial Structure and the Emergence of Modern Corporation,” Explorations in Economic History (1985)

• Week 6 (May, 3-5) Slavery: The Classic Debate and Regional Wealth
  – Fogel and Engerman “Explaining the Relative Efficiency of Slave Agriculture in the Antebellum South,” AER (1977)
  – Presentations:
    * Clegg “Credit Market Discipline and Capitalist Slavery in Antebellum South Carolina.” Social Science History (2018)

• Paper proposal due by May 6th

• Week 7 (May, 10-12) Westward Expansion, The Politics of Slavery, and Wage Comparison
  – Presentations:

- **Week 8 (May, 17-19) Economic Mobility, Inequality and Migration**
  - **Presentations:**
    * Alsan et al. “Understanding the Success of the Know-Nothing Party,” NBER Working Paper

- **Week 9 (May, 24-26) Slavery: Legacy, Persistence and the New Debate**
  - **Presentations:**
• May 31, Memorial day - no classes
• June 1-8, Reading week - no classes
• June 8, Final Work Due

Notes:
“AccessibleNU: Any student requesting accommodations related to a disability or other condition is required to register with AccessibleNU (accessiblenu@northwestern.edu; 847-467-5530) and provide professors with an accommodation notification from AccessibleNU, preferably within the first two weeks of class. All information will remain confidential.”

NUHelp: Students can find useful resources for safety and security, academic support, and mental and physical health and well-being at the NUhelp website and app.” The full URL is https://www.northwestern.edu/nuhelp/

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