

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
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Office Hours: by appointment
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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://www.measuringworth.com/index.php>
- <https://gpih.ucdavis.edu/index.html>
- <https://cblevins.github.io/us-post-offices/data-biography/>

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)
 - Nunn N., “The Importance of History for Economic Development,” *Annual Review of Economics* (2009)
 - Abramitzky, “Economics and the Modern Economic Historian,” *Journal of Economic History* (2015)
- **Week 2 (April, 5-7)** Initial Conditions and Key Economic Forces
 - Hughes and Cain, *American Economic History*, 6th edition. Addison-Wesley (2003) pp. 1-43.
 - Scott Smith D., “A Malthusian-Frontier Interpretation of U.S. Demographic History Before c. 1815,” in W. Borah, *Urbanization in the Americas* (1980)
 - Domar E., “The Causes of Slavery or Serfdom,” *Journal of Economic History* (1970)
 - **Presentations:**
 - * Bazzi et al., “Frontier Culture: The Roots and Persistence of “Rugged Individualism” in the United States,” *Econometrica* (2020)
 - * Acemoglu et al., “The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development: An Empirical Investigation” *American Economic Review* (2001)
- **Week 3 (April, 12-14)** The Problem of Labor in Colonial America
 - Galenson, “The Rise and Fall of Indentured Servitude in the Americas: An Economic Analysis,” *Journal of Economic History* (1984)
 - Galenson, “White Servitude and the Growth of Black Slavery in Colonial America,” *Journal of Economic History* (1981)
 - Grubb, “The End of European Immigrant Servitude in the United States: An Economic Analysis of Market Collapse, 1772-1835,” *Journal of Economic History* (1994)
 - Pearson and Richardson, “Insuring the Transatlantic Slave Trade,” *Journal of Economic History* (2019)
 - Wiecek, “The Statutory Law of Slavery and Race in the Thirteen Mainland Colonies of British America,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* (1977)
 - **Presentations:**
 - * Abramitzky and Braggion, “Migration and Human Capital: Self-Selection of Indentured Servants to the Americas,” *Journal of Economic History* (2006)
 - * Menard, “From Servant to Freeholder: Status Mobility and Property Accumulation in Seventeenth-Century Maryland,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* (1973)

- * Esposito, “The Side Effects of Immunity: Malaria and African Slavery in the United States,” *AEJ: Applied* (forthcoming)
- **Week 4 (April, 19-21)** Institutional Divergence North vs. South and Agricultural Development
 - Alston and Schapiro, “Inheritance Laws Across Colonies: Causes and Consequences,” *The Journal of Economic History* (1984)
 - Rothenberg, “The Market and Massachusetts Farmers, 1750-1855,” *The Journal of Economic History* (1982)
 - Weiss, “The Market and Massachusetts Farmers, 1750-1850- Comment” *The Journal of Economic History* (1983)
 - Weiss, “Primitive Accumulation in the United States: The Interaction between Capitalist and Noncapitalist Class Relations in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts,” *The Journal of Economic History* (1982)
 - Price and Clemens, “ A Revolution of Scale in Overseas Trade: British Firms in the Chesapeake Trade, 1675-1775,” *Journal of Economic History* (1987)
 - **Presentations:**
 - * Sokoloff and Engerman, “Institutions, Factor Endowments, and Paths of Development in the New World,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* (2000)
 - * Sokoloff and Engerman, “The evolution of suffrage institutions in the Americas,” *Journal of Economic History* (2005)
 - * Wright, “Slavery and American Agricultural History,” *Agricultural History* (2003)
- **Topics approved by April 22**
- **Week 5 (April, 26- 28)** Early Industrialization and Technological Adoption and Growth
 - Goldin and Sokoloff “The Relative Productivity Hypothesis of Industrialization: The American Case, 1820 to 1850,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* (1984)
 - Weiss, “U.S. Labor Force Estimates and Economic Growth,” in R. Gallman and J. Wallis, eds., *American Economic Growth and Standards of Living Before the Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992)
 - **Presentations:**
 - * Bessen, “Technology and Learning by Factory Workers: The Stretch-Out at Lowell, 1842,” *The Journal of Economic History* (2003)
 - * Atack, “Industrial Structure and the Emergence of Modern Corporation,” *Explorations in Economic History* (1985)

- * Olmstead, “The Mechanization of Reaping in the Antebellum Midwest,” *The Journal of Economic History* (1975)
- **Week 6 (May, 3- 5) Slavery: The Classic Debate and Regional Wealth**
 - Anderson and Gallman, “Slaves as fixed capital: slave labor and southern economic development,” *The Journal of American History* (1977)
 - Fogel and Engerman “Explaining the Relative Efficiency of Slave Agriculture in the Antebellum South,” *AER* (1977)
 - Fenoaltea “The slavery debate: A note from the sidelines” *Explorations in Economic History* (1981)
 - Wright, “The Efficiency of Slavery: Another Interpretation,” *The American Economic Review* (1979)
 - Ransom, R., & Sutch, R. (2001). Construction of income and welfare estimates: 1859–1899. In *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation* (pp. 203-219). Cambridge: Cambridge University
 - Yasuba, “The Profitability and Viability of Plantation Slavery in the United States,” (1961)
 - **Presentations:**
 - * Clegg “Credit Market Discipline and Capitalist Slavery in Antebellum South Carolina.” *Social Science History* (2018)
 - * Earle “A Staple Interpretation of Slavery and Free Labor,” *Geographical Review* (1978)
 - * Hanes “Turnover Cost and the Distribution of Slave Labor in Anglo-America.” *The Journal of Economic History* (1996)
 - * Fenoaltea, “Slavery and supervision in comparative perspective: a model,” *The Journal of Economic History* (1984)
- **Paper proposal due by May 6th**
- **Week 7 (May, 10- 12) Westward Expansion, The Politics of Slavery, and Wage Comparison**
 - Fogel, “Without Consent or Contract: The Rise and Fall of American Slavery,” New York & London: W. W. Norton (1989) pp. 60-114
 - Wright, “Slavery and American Economic Development,” LSU Press (2006)
 - Masera and Rosenberg, “Tell Me What You Grow and I’ll Tell You What You Think: Westward Expansion and the Politics of Slavery in the U.S. South,” Working Paper
 - **Presentations:**

- * Margo, “Regional Wage Gaps and the Settlement of the Midwest,” *Explorations in Economic History* (1999)
 - * Clegg, “The Real Wages of Whiteness: Non-slaveowners in the Slave South,” Working Paper
 - * Calomiris and Pritchett, “Betting on Secession: Quantifying Political Events Surrounding Slavery and the Civil War,” *AER* (2016)
 - * González, Marshall, and Naidu “Start-up Nation? Slave Wealth and Entrepreneurship in Civil War Maryland” *Journal of Economic History* (2017)
- **Week 8 (May, 17- 19) Economic Mobility, Inequality and Migration**
 - Ferrie, “The Entry into the U.S. Labor Market of Antebellum European Immigrants, 1840-60,” *Explorations in Economic History* (1997)
 - Ferrie, “The Wealth Accumulation of Antebellum European Immigrants to the U.S., 1840-60,” *The Journal of Economic History* (1994)
 - Abramitzky and Boustan, “Immigration in American Economic History,” *Journal of Economic Literature* (2017)
 - **Presentations:**
 - * Alsan et al. “Understanding the Success of the Know-Nothing Party,” NBER Working Paper
 - * Dippel and Heblish, “Leadership in Social Movements: Evidence from the “Forty-Eighters” in the Civil War,” *AER* (2021)
 - * Steckel and Moehling “Rising Inequality: Trends in the Distribution of Wealth in Industrializing New England,” *The Journal of Economic History* (2001)
- **Week 9 (May, 24- 26) Slavery: Legacy, Persistence and the New Debate**
 - Wright “Slavery and Anglo-American capitalism revisited,” EHS Annual Conference (2019)
 - Olmstead and Rhode “Cotton, slavery, and the new history of capitalism” *Explorations in Economic History* (2018)
 - **Presentations:**
 - * Nunn “Slavery, Inequality, and Economic Development in the Americas: An Examination of the Engerman-Sokoloff Hypothesis.” In: Helpman E *Institutions and Economic Performance*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press (2008)
 - * Acharya et al. “The Political Legacy of American Slavery,” *Journal of Politics* (2016)
 - * Sacerdote, “Slavery and the Intergenerational Transmission of Human Capital,” *The Review of Economics and Statistics* (2005)

- **May 31, Memorial day - no classes**
- **June 1-8, Reading week - no classes**
- **June 8, Final Work Due**

Notes:

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