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, provide it with more historical context and motivation, and stimulate similar research.

After two introductory lectures by me in the first week, 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 constraints (1) that all papers have to be covered and (2) that distribution is about as equitable as is humanly possible and (3) nobody presents twice in one week. Each student should prepare a powerpoint lecture of about 30-45 minutes on her/his assigned papers, summarizing the most interesting and important findings, while reviewing and criticizing the methodology and sources used. Note that a substantial proportion of the items are “packages” of two papers — so take that into account.

Out of courtesy to your fellow students, class attendance is mandatory except when excused in advance.

All papers and chapters articles have been placed on the canvas site of this course. They can be found in the “files section” of the Canvas site.

Week 1 (Jan 8, 10): Introduction/Mokyr

Background reading:


Week 2: (Jan. 15 and 17): Long-term Economic growth


**Week 3: (Jan. 22 and 24): The Great Malthusian Debate**


**Week 4: (Jan. 29 and 31): Issues in the Early Rise of Europe**


Week 5 (Feb. 5, 7): Cities and Growth in the European Past


Michel Serafinelli and Guido Tabellini, “Creativity over Time and Space,” 2018, working paper.


Week 6 (Feb. 12, 14): The Industrial Revolution and Technological Progress


Week 7 (Feb. 19, 21): Mysteries of Persistence

Week 8 (Feb. 26, 28): Institutions and the Evolution of Modern Economies


Week 9 (March 5, 7): The New Economic History of Culture and Religion


Week 10 (March 12, 14): Economic Riddles of China’s past


