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 of modern economics and relying on its methods. In the past decades, a great deal of economic history has been written by scholars (some full-time economic historians, others part-timers and interlopers) applying economic theory and econometric methods to historical issues. These papers have produced and utilized new and innovative methods and databases and come up with new insights. The purpose of the course is to survey a sample of this recent literature, provide it with more historical context and motivation, and stimulate similar research.

The course will consist of two weekly lectures of 110 minutes each, given in person subject to the usual caveats. Each meeting will be devoted to a different topic that has been of concern to researchers in the field. Class attendance, in person is required and will be monitored, and non-attending students may be dropped from the course.

Structure: Following two weeks of introductory lectures, each class will be devoted to 2 papers or packages of papers (4 per week).

Requirements: from week 3 on, a subset of the papers discussed in class and listed on the Reading List (the one that can be chosen by students are marked with an *) will be assigned to one student who will prepare a written 3-4 pp. “mock referee report” on the paper consisting of a brief summary, background, motivation, data and techniques employed, persuasiveness and significance of the results, flaws and doubts (if any). This report is due no later than 2 days before the lecture on the paper, and the student will present the report in class after my introductory lecture on the topic.

The report (and the brief presentation based on it) should contain a summary description and assessment of the paper: topic, significance, main data and methodology, conclusions, and assessment. The presentation should be 25-30 minutes, not more. *I will mercilessly cut you off after 30 minutes.* After the presentations, I may respond to some of the student reports and we will have 10 minutes for questions and general discussion of the material.

The rules for these reports/presentations are:
1. Make sure to observe the deadline and time limits.
2. No joint work, each report/presentation will discuss one paper by one student.
3. Papers will be allocated by me, through a first come first serve mechanism, subject to various constraints. Please submit a list of 5 papers in declining order of preference starting right after the end of the first lecture on January 4.
4. Further details and instructions will be provided during the first week of January and the first week of classes.
Exact details will depend on the number of students taking the course for credit and I will circulate this information as soon as I know more. After the first round of allocation, I will allow Pareto-improving trades. It would help a great deal if everyone could register for the course well in advance, so that I can do the planning based on the number of students.

In addition to these class presentations, the grades will be determined by a substantial research paper, due one year after the end of the course. The paper should be original and based on research. It must be historical, and display an understanding of the context and environment of the past.

Joint papers are acceptable as long as $n \leq 2$, but the quality of joint work is expected to be proportionally higher than in solo papers.

Papers submitted for this class have historically fallen under three categories:

- Publishable papers (A) --- many of them are (eventually) published or: novel research papers, using original historical data or narratives, advanced theory and/or econometric methods, consisting of original and solid research.
- Non-publishable but acceptable papers (B)
- Non-acceptable papers (returned for revision).

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

**Reading List, by week.**

Please Note: Items marked by * are items that may be presented by a student, the other papers will be presented by me, but **both** should be read by all students. The exact number of asterisked papers will be adjusted as needed.

**Week 1:**

*Lecture 1:* Jan 4: General outline and introduction to modern economic history.

*Lecture 2:* Jan. 6: Ancient Origins of Economic Civilization


Week 2:

Lecture 1: Jan 11: Malthusian Models in economic history


Lecture 2: Jan. 13: The Great Puzzle of Fertility Decline


Week 3:

Lecture 1: January 18, Cities and Urbanization in the Past


Lecture 2: January 20: Universities and Intellectuals in the Past


Week 4:

Lecture 1: January 25: The Mysteries of Persistence (1)


**Lecture 2:** January 27: The Mysteries of Persistence (2)


**Week 5:**

**Lecture 1:** February 1: Economic issues in Early Modern Europe 1: Macroinventions before the Industrial Revolution


**Lecture 2:** February 3: Economic Issues in Modern Europe 2: The Economics of the Reformation


**Week 6:**

**Lecture 1:** February 8: Institutions 1: The New Institutional Economic history


**Lecture 2**: February 10: Institutions 2: Long- and short term institutional change.


**Week 7:**

**Lecture 1**: February 15: Religion and Culture in the past


**Lecture 2**: February 17: Culture, Religion, and Economic Growth


**Week 8:**

**Lecture 1**: February 22: The Economics of Technology and the Industrial Revolution


**Lecture 2**: February 24: The Industrial Revolution and the Class Struggle.


**Week 9:**

*Lecture 1*: March 1: The Economics of Nazism


*Leander Heldring, “Bureaucracy as a tool for politicians: Evidence from Weimar and Nazi Germany” working paper.

*Lecture 2*: March 3: The Economics of Antisemitism


**Week 10:**

*Lecture 1*: March 8: Europe vs. China


*Lecture 2*: March 10: To be determined.