

ECONOMIC HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES

ECONOMICS 4524

COURSE SYLLABUS

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Fall 2008

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INTRODUCTION

This course examines North America's past from the perspective of economics. In designing the course, I had two objectives in mind. First, topics have been chosen to provide a perspective on the development of American economy from the Colonial period to the present. Second, this is a course in applied economics. To that end, topics have been chosen to illustrate how evidence and theory are combined to further our understanding of particular historical events. The economist, by his or her training, tends to become expert in the construction and manipulation of theory or of hypothesis. The historian tends to become expert on sources, evidence, and their reliability. A satisfactory social science should combine both of these aspects. Economic history presents a nearly unique opportunity to observe the use of economics as a mode of explanation across a wide range of questions and issues. Often we study issues which have been raised by non-economists and studying these questions deepens our appreciation of how we can use the tools of the economists to answer a very broad range of questions.

Evaluation

Your grade will have the following components: one midterm exam (35% each); a final exam (40%); a group project (20%); and class attendance taken randomly (5%).

Both the midterm and the final examinations will be take home examinations and will be posted on the class site on the Economics Department home page under courses. All examinations must be double spaced, typed and meet the guidelines laid out.

Midterm 1 - posted October 7 -- Due October 14 in class
Final Exam - posted December 12 -- Due no later than Dec 15 at 4.00pm

There will be NO make-up examinations and NO late papers will be accepted.

Information on the group project will be provided in class. You will be working in groups of 3-4 people. The project will be due in class Thursday November 20, 2008

Cheating/Plagiarism

Cheating and plagiarism are academic offenses and any student caught cheating or plagiarizing will be sanctioned. If you are unsure or uncertain about what constitutes either cheating or plagiarism, please consult me, the University of Colorado catalog, or the honor code.

Required Reading

Jeremy Atack and Peter Passell, *A New Economic View of American History*, 2nd Ed.

These books will be supplemented by journal articles and other readings which are available either through E-journals or on reserve in the Norlin.

TOPICS

1. **Introduction: Thinking about Long-Run Economic Growth**

Atack and Passell (A & P), ch. 1

Mel Watkins, "A Staple Theory of Economic Growth," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, 1963, 29, pp141-158.

Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson and James A. Robinson, "Colonial Origins of Comparative Development" *AER* (2001): 1369-1401

2. **Colonial Economy and the Revolution:**

Indentured Servitude: The Market for Moving People to America
A & P, pp 40-51

David Galenson, *Markets in History*, ch. 2

Farley Grubb, "The Statutory Regulation of Colonial Servitude," **Explorations in Economic History** 37 (January 2000)

Winifred Rothenberg, "The Market and Massachusetts Farmers," **Journal of Economic History** 41 (June 1981)

The Constitution as an Economic Document

A & P, pp 75-79

The Constitution of the United States

Douglass North, "Institutions", **Journal of Economic Perspectives** (1991)

Robert McQuire and Robert Obsfeldt, "An Economic Model of Voting Behavior over Specific Issues at the Constitutional Convention of 1787," *Journal of Economic History*, Vol 46, No. 1 (March 1986)

3. **The Other Side of the Frontier: Native American Issues**

Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel*, ch. 8, ch. 9 and ch. 10

Linda Barrington, ed, *Other Side of the Frontier*, Editor's Introduction

Ann Carlos and Frank Lewis, "Indians, the Beaver, and the Bay: The Economics of Depletion in the Lands of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1700-1763," *Journal of Economic History*, 53, September 1993, pp. 465-494.

David Wishart, "Evidence of Surplus Production in the Cherokee Nation Prior to Removal", *Journal of Economic History*, vol. 55, no. 1, March 1995, pp. 120-38.

Frank Tough, "Indian Economic Behaviour, Exchange and Profits in Northern Manitoba During the Decline of Monopoly, 1870-1930," *Journal of Historical Geography*, 16, 1990, pp. 385-401.

4. **Revolution to the Civil War:**

Financing the Government

A & P, ch. 5

Mark Kanazawa, "Possession is Nine Points of the Law: The Political Economy of Early Public Land Disposal." **Journal of Economic History**, (April 1996).

The Transportation Revolution

A & P, ch. 6

Douglas Puffert, "The Standardization of Track Gauge on North American Railways, 1830-1890," **Journal of Economic History** 60 (December 2000)

Industrialization and Northern Agriculture

A & P, ch. 5 and ch. 10

Richard Pomfret, "The Mechanization of Reaping in Nineteenth-Century Ontario: A Case Study in the Pace and Causes of Diffusion of Embodied Technical Change" *Journal of Economic History*, June 1976.

Southern Agriculture and Slavery

A & P, ch. 11 and ch. 12

Richard Steckel, "A Peculiar Population: The Nutrition, Health and Mortality of American Slaves from Childhood to Maturity." **JEH** 46 (1986c).

5. **The Civil War to the First World War**

Southern Reconstruction

A & P, ch. 14

Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South*, ch. 2 and ch. 3

Lee J. Alston and Robert Higgs, "Contractual Mix in Southern Agriculture since the Civil War: Facts, Hypothesis and Tests" **JEH**, 42 (1981)

The Rise of Big Business

A & P, ch.17

Mark Aldrich, *Safety First; Technology, Labor, and Business in the Building of American Safety, 1870-1930* ch. 1 and ch. 5

Alfred D. Chandler, "Organizational Capabilities and the Economic History of the Industrial Enterprise," **Journal of Economic Perspectives** 6 (Summer 1992)

Video: *Mr Sear's Catalogue*

6. Interwar Period and Great Depression

The Market for Labor

A & P, ch. 8 and ch. 19

Claudia Goldin, *Understanding the Gender Gap*, ch. 2 and ch. 3

Carolyn M. Moehling, "Family Structure, School Attendance, and Child Labor in the American South in 1900 and 1910", *Explorations in Economic History*, January 2004.

The Roaring Twenties

A & P, ch. 20

The Great Depression

A & P, ch. 21 and ch. 22

Video: Job at Ford's No. 1

7. New Frontier and the Great Society

William J. Collins, "The Political Economy of State-Level Fair Employment Laws 1940-1964," *Explorations in Economic History*, January 2003.

Lee Alston and Joseph Ferrie, "Paternalism in Agricultural Labor Contracts in the U.S. South: Implications for the Growth of the Welfare State," *American Economic Review*, Vol 83, September 1993.