

Econ-365.02: Topics in economic history (Fall 2017)

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1 General information

Tuesday & Thursday, 3:00-4:15 PM, Innovation Hall 131, Fairfax campus.

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Office hours: Thursday, 9:00-10:30 AM or by appointment. Buchanan Hall, F.A. Hayek program office, D137-7.

2 Course objectives

The objective of this course is to introduce the student to the economic (or “rational choice”) approach to history. Indeed, this class would be better characterized as “The Economics of the past.” Thus, the students will be exposed to a wide array of academic papers that apply the basic tools of economic analysis to historical events, processes, and institutions,

3 Readings

Recommended Textbooks:

Principles of economics: Heyne, Paul T., Peter J. Boettke, and David L. Prychitko. *The economic way of thinking*. Pearson Education International.

Intermediate microeconomics: Friedman, David D. Price theory (link: http://www.daviddfriedman.com/Academic/Price_Theory/PThy_ToC.html)

4 Scheduled outline

4.1 Week 1

The economic way of thinking.

Becker, G. S. [The economic approach to human behavior](#).

Alchian, A. A. & Demsetz, H. [The property rights paradigm](#).

4.2 Week 2

Primitive economics.

Sterelny, K. [Rational choice in the neolithic](#).

Posner, R. A. [A theory of primitive societies, with special reference to law](#).

Leeson, P. T. [Human sacrifice](#).

4.3 Week 3

Superstition.

Leeson, P. T. [Goddamn](#).

Leeson, P. T. [Ordeals](#).

Suchman, M. [Invention and ritual](#).

4.4 Week 4

Slavery.

Barzel, Y. [An economic analysis of slavery](#).

Nunn, N. & Wantchekon L. [The slave trade and the origins of mistrust in Africa](#).

4.5 Week 5

The medieval church.

Ekelund, R. et al. [An economic model of the medieval church](#).

Rubin, J. [Printing and protestants](#).

Leeson, P. T. & Russ, J. W. [Witch trials](#).

4.6 Week 6

Conflict.

Anderson et al. [An economic interpretation of the crusades](#).

Gregory, P. R. et al. [Rational dictators and the killing of innocents](#).

Skarbek, D. & Marcum A. [Why didn't slaves revolt more often during the middle passage](#).

4.7 Week 7

Crime.

Leeson, P. T. [An-aaargh-chy](#).

Skarbek, D. [Governance and prison gangs](#).

Dimico et al. [Origins of the Sicilian mafia](#).

4.8 Week 8

Midterm.

4.9 Week 9

Institutions.

Acemoglu, D. et al. [Reversal of fortunes](#).

Galeser E. D. & Shleifer A. [Legal origins](#).

Baumol, W. [Entrepreneurship: Productive, unproductive, destructive](#).

4.10 Week 10

Markets.

DeLong, B. & Shleifer, A. [Princes and merchants](#).

Greif, A. [Contract enforceability and economic institutions](#).

Milgrom et al. [The role of institutions in the revival of trade](#).

4.11 Week 11

The rise of the modern state.

Dincecco, M. [The rise of effective states in Europe](#).

Johnson, N. & Koyama, M. [Tax farming and the origins of state capacity in England and France](#).

Batchelder, R. & Freudenberger, H. [On the rational origins of the modern centralized state](#).

4.12 Week 12

The paradox of the state

North, D. & Weingast, B. [Constitutions and commitment](#).

Weingast, B. [The economic role of political institutions](#).

Salter, A. W. [Rights to the realm](#).

4.13 Week 13

Great divergence.

Ma, D. [Rock, scissors, paper](#).

Kuran, T. [The islamic commercial crisis](#).

Acemoglu, D. & Robinson, J. A. [Why is Africa poor?](#)

4.14 Week 14

Culture and deep roots.

Spolaore, E. & Wacziarg, R. [How deep are the roots of economic development?](#)

Greif, A. [Cultural beliefs and the organization of society.](#)

Nunn, N. [The importance of history for economic development.](#)

4.15 Week 15

Society.

Stark, R. & Iannaccone, L. R. [A Supply-Side Reinterpretation of the “Secularization” of Europe.](#)

Becker, G. S. [An economic analysis of fertility.](#)

Goldin, C. [The Quiet Revolution That Transformed Women’s Employment, Education, and Family.](#)

4.15.1 Important dates

- September 5th, last day to add and drop classes without penalty.
- September 19th, last day to drop with a 33% tuition penalty.
- September 29th, last day to drop with a 66% tuition penalty.
- November 22nd-26th, Thanksgiving recess.
- December 9th, last day of class.
- December 13th-20th, exam period.

5 Grading

The final grade will be the weighted average of weekly quizzes (30%), a midterm (30%), and a final examination (40%). While not required, attendance is *strongly* recommended. To encourage class participation, I will reward students who contribute to class discussion over the semester with a bump of a third of the grade (say, for example, from B- to B). There is no make up work for this class.

5.0.1 The grading scale is as follows:

A+: 97-100%; A: 92-96%; A-: 88-91%; B+: 84-87%; B: 80-83%; B-: 76-79%; C: 71-75%; D: 66-70%; F: <66%.

6 Academic integrity

George Mason University’s Honor Code requires all community members to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. Cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing are all prohibited. Honor Code violations will be reported to the Honor Committee. Plagiarism is not accepted (statements from Macon web site: <http://mason.gmu.edu/montecin/plagiarism/htm#plagiarism>). The use of electronic devices is prohibited during an exam or a quiz; failure to comply with this will result in your failure of the assignment and potentially the failure of the class. Make sure to familiarize yourself with the GMU Honor Code, which is stated in the George Mason University Undergraduate Catalog.

