

**Econ. 365 Topics in Economic History**  
**George Mason University, Spring 2024**  
**Lectures: Asynchronous**

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**Instructor:** Noel D. Johnson

**Email:** njohnsoL@gmu.edu

**Office Location:** Carow 8

**Office Hours:** TBA—Will be held on Zoom.

**Course Webpage:** Blackboard

**Course Description**

In this course we will read and discuss a selection of articles about Economic History. The format of the course is thematic – I will not be teaching the narrative of history. I place a lot of emphasis on teaching you how to consume cutting-edge empirical research. There is no required text and all of the readings are downloadable from the internet.

**Course Requirements**

*Eighty percent of success is showing up* – Woody Allen

*Hear the words of Snoop Dogg:* “[The syllabus, you gotta do it, you gotta read it!](#)”

- Book essay worth one-third of your final grade.
- Midterm exam worth one-third of your final grade.
- Comprehensive final exam worth one-third of your final grade.

**Communication**

I will post the syllabus, readings, and announcements to the class web page on Blackboard.

Email is the best way to get in touch with me. You can contact me at: [njohnsoL@gmu.edu](mailto:njohnsoL@gmu.edu).

Lectures will be in person. However, from time to time it may be convenient for us to communicate using zoom. Zoom is free. [Follow the instructions at this link to get started.](#)

My personal zoom meeting room link is:

[Click this link to join zoom meeting](#)

Meeting ID: 912 315 3945

Passcode: 3J5KNG

### **Class Lectures**

This is an online class and, as such, there will be no in-person meetings. Lectures will be delivered “asynchronously”—meaning that I will record them on Zoom and then post them to Blackboard for you to view at your leisure. I will post these lectures by **Wednesday afternoon** each week.

### **The Weekly Zoom Meetings (optional, but highly recommended)**

I will hold a weekly Zoom meeting during which time you can ask me questions about the material or administrative aspects of the class. Attending these sessions is optional, but I highly recommend it. I will also record these sessions and will post them on Blackboard. I will determine the day and time of these meeting within the first week of class.

Zoom is free. [Follow the instructions at this link to get started.](#)

### **The Midterm Exam**

The take-home midterm will be distributed on March 11 and will be collected a couple days later (I will include more details on the test sheet).

### **The Final Exam**

The take-home final will be distributed on May 1 and will be collected a couple days later (I will include more details on the test sheet).

A note on both the midterm and final exams. Both exams will allow for open notes and access to all class material (e.g. lecture videos). As such, successful take-home exams should contain more detail than a typical, closed-notes, in-class exam. Most importantly, make sure that your exam answers show me that you have understood the material covered in class and that you can actively engage with it. If you try and google answers or use ChatGPT you will almost surely fail because neither google nor ChatGPT has not taken my class and any response you find will probably have a lot of irrelevant material.

### **Grade Disputes**

If you wish to dispute the grading of an exam you must submit a written request making explicit reference to the problem(s) along with the original test within one week of the day I return the graded exam. I will then review your arguments and decide if a mistake was made. Under no circumstances will I discuss grading with a student until after I have received and reviewed the written complaint.

### **Book Essay**

This course fulfills the Writing Intensive requirement for the Economics major. It does so through the completion of a book essay worth one-third of your grade. You must choose two books from the list below. You will write an essay describing how these books relate to the themes we discussed in class. The paper should start with an introduction that lays out what books you have chosen and briefly describes their main hypotheses. You should then spend a significant portion of the paper overviews the main arguments of the books. Please explain what the arguments are and how the author(s) substantiate the arguments. Importantly, you must then discuss how do these arguments relate to the material we've covered in class? Finally, evaluate whether the books you chose complement each other or are they critiques?

The paper should be typed in a reasonable font. Double spaced with reasonable margins. The paper should be around 15 pages (but this is only a guideline). The paper is due on Monday, April 29 at 5 pm EST. **I will only accept pdf's emailed to me. The subject line of your email should be "EH Essay" and the name of the essay pdf should be "your last name EH Essay"**. For every 24 hours the paper is late, your paper grade will be reduced by one half of a letter grade (i.e. 5%).

1. Timur Kuran. *The long divergence: How Islamic law held back the Middle East*. Princeton University Press, 2012
2. Deirdre N McCloskey. *The bourgeois virtues: Ethics for an age of commerce*. University of Chicago Press, 2010
3. Kenneth Pomeranz. *The great divergence: China, Europe, and the making of the modern world economy*, volume 28. Princeton University Press, 2009
4. Philip T Hoffman. *Why did Europe conquer the world?* Princeton University Press, 2017
5. Walter Scheidel. *The great leveler: Violence and the history of inequality from the stone age to the twenty-first century*. Princeton University Press, 2018
6. Robert C Allen. *The British industrial revolution in global perspective*. Cambridge University Press, 2009
7. Joel Mokyr. *The Enlightened economy an economic history of Britain 1700-1850*. Yale University Press, 2010
8. Jared Rubin. *Rulers, Religion, and Riches: Why the West got rich and the Middle East did not*. Cambridge University Press, 2017
9. Noel D Johnson and Mark Koyama. *Persecution & toleration: The long road to religious freedom*. Cambridge University Press, 2019
10. Daron Acemoglu and James A Robinson. *The Narrow Corridor: States, Societies, and the Fate of Liberty*. Penguin Press, 2019
11. Douglass C North, John Joseph Wallis, and Barry R Weingast. *Violence and social orders: A conceptual framework for interpreting recorded human history*. Cambridge University Press, 2009

12. Jared M Diamond. *Guns, germs and steel: a short history of everybody for the last 13,000 years*. Random House, 1998

## Course Materials

We will be reading many articles which are available for download on the class's Dropbox folder accessed via a link on the course webpage. In addition, most of the readings can be downloaded from either JSTOR, the NBER Working Papers archive, or EconLit through the GMU libraries research databases page. You are required to acquire these papers and read them during the week they are covered. You are expected to know the readings for the exams.

You can either purchase the books for your essay or you can get them from the library.

Also, some of the articles require knowledge of econometric techniques. I will explain the methods used when they come up, however, this is not an econometrics class and you may wish to have a more detailed treatment of the methods at your disposal. Two excellent sources for the basics are:

- Cunningham, S. (2020). *Causal Inference: The Mixtape*.
- Huntington-Kline, N. (2021). *The Effect: An Introduction to Research Design and Causality*.

I have also been enjoying this book recently as a guide to integrating theory with empirical design:

- Ashworth, S., Berry, C.R. and de Mesquita, E.B., (2021). *Theory and Credibility: Integrating Theoretical and Empirical Social Science*. Princeton University Press.

A good place to get advice on how to write a paper is, D.N. McCloskey. *Economical Writing*. Waveland Press, 2000

Or, you could take a look at the material on my webpage here: [https://noeldjohnson.github.io/student\\_advice/](https://noeldjohnson.github.io/student_advice/)

## Some Important Dates

First Day of Classes: **1/16**

Spring Break: **3/4-3/10**

Last Day of Classes: **4/29**

Final Exam: **Distributed on 5/1**

Final Paper Due: **4/29 at 5 pm EST**

## **PLEASE NOTE: COURSE POLICIES**

### **1. George Mason University Honor System and Code**

#### *Honor Code*

George Mason University has an Honor Code, which requires all members of this community to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. Cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing are all prohibited.

All violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Committee.

Plagiarism (statements from Mason Web Site)

Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another person without giving that person credit.

<http://mason.gmu.edu/montecin/plagiarism.htm#plagiarism>

Please familiarize yourself with the Honor System and Code, as stated in the George Mason University Undergraduate Catalog. When you are given an assignment as an individual, the work must be your own. Some of your work may be collaborative; source material for group projects and work of individual group members must be carefully documented for individual contributions.

<http://mason.gmu.edu/montecin/plagiarism.htm>

### **2. Class Registration**

Students are responsible for verifying the accuracy of their own schedules. Students need to check PatriotWeb regularly to verify that they are registered for the classes that they think they are. This is particularly important since students are no longer dropped for nonpayment.

Faculty may not allow a student who is not registered to continue to attend class and may not grade the work of students who do not appear on the official class roster.

Deadlines each semester are published in the Schedule of Classes available from the Registrar's Web Site [registrar.gmu.edu](http://registrar.gmu.edu)

After the last day to drop a class, withdrawing from this class requires the approval of the dean and is only allowed for nonacademic reasons.

Undergraduate students may choose to exercise a selective withdrawal. See the Schedule of Classes for selective withdrawal procedures.

### **3. Accommodations for students with disabilities:**

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Resources at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

The need for accommodations should be identified at the beginning of the semester and the specific accommodation has to be arranged through the Office of Disability Resources. Faculty cannot provide accommodations to students on their own (e.g. allowing a student extra time to complete an exam because the student reports having a disability).

### ***Week 1: Introduction and Course Themes***

- Chapter 1, “The Sixteen Page Economic History of the World” in Gregory Clark. *A farewell to alms: a brief economic history of the world*. Princeton University Press, 2008
- Chapter 2, “The Logic of the Malthusian Economy” in Gregory Clark. *Farewell to Alms*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 2007
- Nathan Nunn. The historical roots of economic development. *Science*, 367(6485), 2020

### ***Week 2: Measurement***

- Pages 291 to 300 of David A Freedman. Statistical models and shoe leather. *Sociological methodology*, pages 291–313, 1991
- Marginal Revolution University: [Mastering Metrics Online Course](#)

### ***Week 3: The Black Death and It’s Consequences***

- Remi Jedwab, Noel Johnson, and Mark Koyama, “The Economic Impact of the Black Death”, *Forthcoming in the Journal of Economic Literature*.
- Nico Voigtländer and Hans-Joachim Voth. Gifts of mars: warfare and europe’s early rise to riches. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 27(4):165–86, 2013

### ***Week 4: Trade and Exchange***

- Avner Greif. The fundamental problem of exchange: a research agenda in historical institutional analysis. *European Review of Economic History*, 4(3):251–284, 2000
- Jonathan F Schulz, Duman Bahrami-Rad, Jonathan P Beauchamp, and Joseph Henrich. The church, intensive kinship, and global psychological variation. *Science*, 366(6466), 2019
- Eliana Balla and Noel D Johnson. Fiscal crisis and institutional change in the ottoman empire and france. *The Journal of Economic History*, 69(3):809–845, 2009

### ***Week 5: Institutions and Constitutions***

- Federalist No. 10. Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay. The Federalist Papers. Any edition, any publisher.
- Douglass C North and Barry R Weingast. Constitutions and commitment: the evolution of institutions governing public choice in seventeenth-century england. *The journal of economic history*, 49(4):803–832, 1989
- Steven CA Pincus and James A Robinson. What really happened during the glorious revolution? Technical report, National Bureau of Economic Research, 2011
- Naomi R Lamoreaux. The mystery of property rights: A us perspective. *The Journal of Economic History*, pages 275–306, 2011

### ***Week 6: Colonialism as a Natural Experiment***

- Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, and James A Robinson. The colonial origins of comparative development: An empirical investigation. *American economic review*, 91(5):1369–1401, 2001
- Melissa Dell. The persistent effects of peru’s mining mita. *Econometrica*, 78(6):1863–1903, 2010

### ***Week 7: Industrialization***

- Robert C Allen. Why the industrial revolution was british: commerce, induced invention, and the scientific revolution 1. *The Economic History Review*, 64(2):357–384, 2011
- Claudia Goldin and Kenneth Sokoloff. The relative productivity hypothesis of industrialization: The american case, 1820 to 1850. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 99(3):461–487, 1984

### ***Week 8: Midterm Take-Home Exam Distributed***

### ***Week 9: Cities***

- Donald R Davis and David E Weinstein. Bones, bombs, and break points: the geography of economic activity. *American Economic Review*, 92(5):1269–1289, 2002
- Hoyt Bleakley and Jeffrey Lin. Portage and path dependence. *The quarterly journal of economics*, 127(2):587–644, 2012

### ***Week 10: Disease***

- Preface and Introduction from Werner Troesken. *The pox of liberty: how the constitution left Americans rich, free, and prone to infection*. University of Chicago Press, 2015
- Brian Beach, Karen Clay, and Martin Saavedra, “The 1918 Influenza Pandemic and its Lessons for COVID-19”, *Forthcoming in the Journal of Economic Literature*.

### ***Week 11: Health & Infrastructure***

- Marcella Alsan and Marianne Wanamaker. Tuskegee and the health of black men. *The quarterly journal of economics*, 133(1):407–455, 2018
- Dave Donaldson and Richard Hornbeck. Railroads and american economic growth: A “market access” approach. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 131(2):799–858, 2016

### ***Week 12: The Legacy of Slavery***

- Video: [Gavin Wright on “Slavery and Anglo-American Capitalism Revisited”](#)
- Gavin Wright. The civil rights revolution as economic history. *The Journal of Economic History*, 59(2):267–289, 1999

### ***Week 13: Inequality***

- Philip T Hoffman, David S Jacks, Patricia A Levin, and Peter H Lindert. Real inequality in europe since 1500. *The Journal of Economic History*, 62(2):322–355, 2002
- Thomas Piketty and Emmanuel Saez. Inequality in the long run. *Science*, 344(6186):838–843, 2014

***Week 14: Review and Work on Papers***