

Econ. 365 Topics in Economic History
George Mason University, Spring 2020
Lectures: Asynchronous

Instructor: Noel D. Johnson

Email: njohnsoL@gmu.edu

Office Location: Carow 8 (currently closed)

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. This semester I will also focus on the historical impacts of disease epidemics. 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 25% of your final grade.
- Midterm exam worth 25% of your final grade.
- Comprehensive final exam worth 25% of your final grade.
- Periodic quizzes administered using Qualtrics worth 25% of your final grade.

Communication

I will post the syllabus, video recordings of the zoom lectures and zoom class meetings (optional), readings, and announcements to the class Blackboard page.

Email is the best way to get in touch with me. My email address is: njohnsoL@gmu.edu.

The Midterm Exam

The take-home midterm will be distributed on March 15 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 3 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 you will almost surely fail because google has not taken my class and any link you find will probably have a lot of irrelevant material.

The Qualtrics Quizzes

I will administer comprehension quizzes periodically using Qualtrics (an online survey tool) to gauge your understanding of the video lectures and the readings. You will receive these as a link in an email I send and they will have a due date assigned to them. I will drop the quiz with your lowest score when calculating your grade (if you miss a quiz, then that counts as a zero).

The Qualtrics quizzes will be sent to the same email address that I have for you on Blackboard. I will try and do this at the same time every week—probably on Mondays around 10am EST. **It is your responsibility to check your junk mail folder to make sure you don't miss any quiz distributions.**

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 25% 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 Friday, April 30 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

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. During the first week of class I will poll the class (using Qualtrics) to determine the best day and time to hold this session. Attending these sessions is optional, but I highly recommend it. I will also record these sessions and will post them on Blackboard.

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

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.

If you would like more material on the empirical methods we cover an excellent source is:

- Joshua Angrist and Jorn-Steffen Pischke, *Mastering Metrics: The Path from Cause to Effect*. (Princeton University Press, 2014).

A good place to get advice on how to write a paper is here:

- D.N. McCloskey. *Economical Writing*. Waveland Press, Incorporated, 2000

Or, you could take a look at the material on my webpage here: https://noeldjohnson.github.io/student_advice/

Some Important Dates

First Day of Classes: Monday, January 25

Last Day of Classes: Friday, April 30

Final Take-Home Exam Distributed: May 3

Final Paper Due: Friday, April 30 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

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).

5. Basic Course Technology Requirements

Activities and assignments in this course will regularly use web-conferencing software (Zoom). In addition to the requirements above, students are required to have a device with a functional camera and microphone. In an emergency, students can connect through a telephone call, but video connection is the expected norm.

6. Course Materials and Student Privacy

Videorecordings—whether made by instructors or students—of class meetings that include audio, visual, or textual information from other students are private and must not be shared outside the class.

Live video conference meetings (e.g. Zoom) that include audio, textual, or visual information from other students must be viewed privately and not shared with others in your household or recorded and shared outside the class.

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 and Causality

- Pages 291 to 300 of David A Freedman. Statistical models and shoe leather. *Sociological methodology*, pages 291–313, 1991
- Marginal Revolution University: [Ceteris Paribus](#)
- Marginal Revolution University: [Selection Bias](#)
- Marginal Revolution University: [Randomized Trials](#)
- Bellemare, “A Primer on Linear Regression”
- Bellemare, “A Primer on Causality”

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
- News Article: [“The Pandemic Will Reduce Inequality—Or Make it Worse”](#), Ben Steverman, *Bloomberg*

Week 14: Review and Work on Papers