

Economic History Comprehensive Exam · May 4, 2016
UCLA Department of Economics
Prof. Leah Boustan and Walker Hanlon

You have three hours to complete the exam. Please answer three of the six essay questions. Answers should be typed and sent by email to Joshua Harris by 5:00pm (jharris@econ.ucla.edu).

1. The labor force participation of prime-age women in the US rose from 20 percent to 80 percent over the 20th century. Was this change primarily driven by demand-side or supply-side factors or a mixture of the two? How could historical data help us to differentiate between these two forces at different points in time?
2. Fernihough & O'Rourke (2015) provide evidence that the location of coal deposits acted as an important influence on economic development in Europe after 1800. Nunn & Qian (2011) show how important the suitability of local conditions to the potato was. Thus, both of these studies emphasize the importance of fixed local geographic features for long-run development. Their findings contrast with studies focusing on institutions, such as the work of Engerman and Sokoloff and the "Reversal of Fortune" documented by Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson (2002). How might we reconcile these two divergent lines of work?
3. There is a large literature arguing that growth in developing countries is hindered by a lack of financial development. What lessons can we learn from US history about the effect of the banking sector and/or access to financial capital on economic growth?
4. Jan DeVries argues that the Industrial Revolution was accompanied by an "Industrious Revolution". Describe the basic idea behind the industrious revolution. What evidence do we have that the industrious revolution that he describes took place? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this evidence? What are the key missing pieces?
5. In class, we discussed a pair of papers by Petra Moser on the patent system. These papers use a historical setting in order to answer questions about the patent system that were difficult to address in modern settings. What were the key contributions of these papers and what was it about the historical setting that made these contributions possible? What are the advantages of using a historical setting to evaluate institutions of this type? Should we be concerned about the generalizability of these findings to modern settings? Why or why not?
6. Generating a long-run pattern for inter-generational mobility in the US is difficult because existing studies use different data sources and methodologies. Using the existing evidence, provide your best guess for long-run trends in inter-generational mobility. How might your conclusions be sensitive to differences between studies? How might the "next generation" of research improve on this scattered evidence?