

## COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION IN ECONOMIC HISTORY

FALL 2007

Answer four of the following six questions. In answering each question, it is advisable to lay out a thesis in the first couple of paragraphs and then work systematically through the evidence to show that it supports your argument.

1. The vastness of the American continent contrasts sharply with the divided territory in Western Europe. On balance, was scale a help or a hindrance to American economic growth? Defend your answer with reference to at least two of the following: the continent's natural resources; mechanization and the American system; transportation and communication technology; and the rise of big business.
2. The economic meaning of family has changed over time. In 1800, the typical American woman had seven children, while she now has two. European countries experienced a similar fertility decline, albeit with different timing and magnitude. In what ways were these fertility declines due to economic growth and in what ways did they contribute to it? In defending your answer, it might be helpful to consider the decline of the family farm; the role of kinship in providing credit; compulsory schooling laws and the ending of child labor; and the rise of female labor force participation, among other factors.
3. Many scholars have argued that rising agricultural productivity is an important precondition for modern economic growth. Explain the logic of this view. To what extent was this argument borne out by the historical experience of England and the U.S.?
4. The 20<sup>th</sup> century has been dubbed the "human capital century." Indeed, higher levels of educational attainment account for around a third of American economic growth over this period. While the diffusion of education increased average income, it had differential impacts on particular groups (for example, women or minorities) and/or on different percentiles of the income distribution. Was the rise of mass education a "rising tide that lifted all boats," or is it more accurate to talk about winners and losers? Defend your answer with particular historical knowledge or examples.
5. Some economic historians, among them N. F. R. Crafts, C. Knick Harley, and Gregory Clark, have argued that we should stop talking about the "industrial revolution" and recognize that economic change was much slower and more gradual than this phrase would suggest. On what evidence do they base their critique? Do you agree with their assessment of the historical data? Do you agree that we should give up the term "industrial revolution"? Explain your reasoning.
6. Some scholars have argued that, by pushing developing countries to adopt free-trade, promote economic transparency, and avoid subsidies or other types of government intervention in the economy, international development agencies are effectively "kicking

away the ladder” that advanced countries used to grow rich. Do you agree? Assess the merits of this argument using evidence from the economic history of the United States.