

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION IN ECONOMIC HISTORY

SPRING 2008

Answer **three** of the following questions:

1. Malthusian theory has long dominated demography. State what Malthusian theory is and discuss whether there is any support for this theory in the historical experience. Could the theory in any way be modified to more accurately fit the historical experience?
2. Although there is considerable debate about the time path of British economic development (and whether Britain experienced something that could be called an industrial revolution), there is general agreement that Britain was the first country to make the transition to modern economic growth. Why Britain? Discuss critically the main alternative hypotheses that have been offered in answer to this question. Which do you think are most convincing and why?
3. Economic historians are only as knowledgeable as their data allow them to be. A number of the findings that we reviewed in class are provisional, given that they are based on a few, perhaps unrepresentative, data points. In the essay, discuss the strengths and weaknesses of three contributions to the field. What gaps in existing knowledge did these efforts fill? In what ways should we be cautious in extrapolating from the data used?
4. Describe the Second Industrial Revolution (1870-1914). What was it, and why did it start in the United States? Discuss how it affected the labor force. Be sure to address the rise in women's labor force participation in your answer.
5. Why isn't the whole world developed? In the last decade or so scholars have offered several long-run historical answers to this question, pointing to factors such as the type of legal system a country originally adopted, whether it was once a colony or not and, if it was a colony, what type. Assess this literature critically with the aim of extracting what we can learn from it about the sources of underdevelopment in the modern world.
6. Throughout American history, government action, either through legislatures or the courts, has resulted in sweeping changes to the economy. Yet, in a representative democracy, reform is more likely when change is in the air. Assess three important pieces of legislation or court decisions. Did these actions bring about real change or were they merely a sign of the times? You may consider reforms in the area of immigration, education, the wage distribution, access to contraception, regulation of commercial activity, or in other spheres.