

**Economic History Comprehensive Exam · April 29, 2013**

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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 Jessica Perez (jessica@econ.ucla.edu).

1. Congress is currently considering broad immigration reform. One element of the reform package proposes to increase the number of legal entry visas. What lessons can we draw from history, if any, about the likely effect of relaxing border restrictions on the selection of immigrants who choose to migrate to the US?

2. Authors such as Douglas North have argued that property rights, and in particular intellectual property rights provided by the patent system, played an important role in generating what T.S. Ashton (1948) described as a “wave of gadgets” that swept over England starting in 1760. Others, such as Joel Mokyr, argue that, while incentives were important for innovation, the patent system did not play a major role in the driving technological progress in Britain during that period. Based on the evidence covered in this course, what is your evaluation of this debate? What do you view as the most important limitation of the existing evidence?

3. The ratio of black-to-white wages increased from 40 percent in 1900 to nearly 80 percent by 1980. Yet, a large portion of this wage convergence took place in a single decade from 1965 to 1975. Use this and other facts to assess the role of direct federal intervention in the labor market versus the slower processes of migration and education in elevating the economic position of African-Americans over the twentieth century.

4. Over the twentieth century, there are two notable patterns of change in the urban wage premium: first, the urban wage premium declined from 1880 to 1915 and then the urban wage premium rose sharply from 1980 to 2000. Using both economic theory and evidence from history, provide a likely explanation for these two trends. What do these patterns reveal about the role of agglomeration forces in generating economic productivity?

5. Describe the key forces that determine the level of income in a Malthusian economy. Is the available evidence supportive of the predictions of this theory for the period prior to the Industrial Revolution? According to the Malthusian model, what impact should an event like the Black Death have had on the European economy?

6. The onset of sustained British economic growth in the late 18th century began a period during which incomes in Western Europe (and European offshoots like the United States) diverged rapidly from incomes in the rest of the world. This occurred despite a sustained increase in the terms-of-trade for most periphery countries. How can we reconcile these observations?