

Economic History Field Exam 2021

Part A. Answer 2 out of 3.

1. “Cliometricians” are inclined to argue that the use of modern statistical methods has resulted in significant advances in our understanding of key issues in economic history. Do you agree with this statement? If so, suggest and analyze three key issues where you believe that this is the case. If you disagree, describe three instances where the use of such methods has led not to greater understanding but to misunderstanding.
2. To what extent are economies before some particular date well-characterized as “Malthusian”, and what is the best date to pick as the likely end of the mostly-Malthusian era?
3. To what extent have economists models and patterns of thought been useful in understanding why the degrees of inequality in societies change over time, and to what extent should we economists simply throw that question over the wall, and let political scientists, sociologists, and anthropologists handle it?

Part B. Answer 2 out of 3.

1. In *Cities of Commerce*, Oscar Gelderblom offers a new explanation for trade expansion in the Low Countries in the 13th through 17th centuries. How does his analysis differ from those of other scholars, such as Douglass North, Barry Weingast and John Wallis, or Acemoglu, Robinson and Johnson (in “The Rise of Atlantic Trade”), or Ron Harris (in *Going the Distance: Eurasian Trade and the Rise of the Business Corporation*)? Which of these historical accounts is most convincing, and why?
2. A large literature in economics and economic history traces the connections between colonial history (how long a region was under control of a metropolitan power, the identity of the colonizer, its policies) and modern economic development and underdevelopment. Examples include Clay and Berkowitz’s book on the United States (*Evolution of a Nation*), Engerman and Sokoloff’s book on the Caribbean and Latin America (*Economic Development in the Americas since 1500*), Acemoglu and Robinson’s work on Africa (“Colonial Origins of Comparative Development”) and Melissa Dell’s work on Peru (“Persistent Effects of Meru’s Mining Mita”). What arguments do they make linking colonial history to modern economic growth? Which arguments are convincing, which not?
3. In *Competition in the Promised Land*, Leah Boustan argues that the Great Migration from US South to North benefitted the average black worker, but at the expense of black economic advancement in the North. How does Boustan explain this tradeoff? How do her conclusions compare with those of more recent work on the Great Migration, such as that of Ellora Derenocourt? Boustan points to “white flight” from city centers as one factor slowing black economic advancement? Again, how does this compare with Derenocourt’s accounting of the causes of slow Northern black economic progress?