

ECONOMIC HISTORY FIELD EXAM

August 2012

Instructions

Answer five of the following 12 questions, but answer no more than two questions from any one part. (That is, you may answer no questions from one part, but must answer questions from at least three parts.)

Part I

- 1.** Recent work on the British industrial revolution, by scholars like Robert Allen and Tony Wrigley, has emphasized the role of energy in Britain's distinctive path. What do Allen and Wrigley argue? Are they convincing?
- 2.** Recent work on craft and merchant guilds by authors like Shelaigh Ogilvie and Gary Richardson has revised the way economic historians think about these early modern institutions. What do Ogilvie and Richardson argue? Do they agree?
- 3.** China's emergence has reinvigorated scholarship on the question of why it fell behind the West economically sometime after the 15th century. Bin Wong, Jean Laurant Rosenthal, Kenneth Pommeranz and others have all written on this question. What are the main explanations in the literature for the "great divergence" between China and the West? How would you evaluate them?

Part II

- 4.** Recent events in Europe have again trained attention on how diverse regional economies were successfully knit together in the United States in the 19th century. Summarize the historical literature on wage and interest-rate convergence in America in this period. What are the important contrasts between labor and capital market integration? What if any are the implications for the eurozone?
- 5.** Historical experience shapes our perception of current problems, but current problems also alter our perception of historical experience. How has – or should – the current financial crisis re-shape views of the Great Depression of the 1930s?
- 6.** Anna J. Schwartz, who passed away in July, is said to have been one of the most important monetary and financial historians of the 20th century. What were her contributions, and why were they important?

Part III

- 7.** Gregory Clark (along with other "Malthusians") claims that "real income in Malthusian economies (all economies after 5000 B.C. and before 1800) was determined from the birth rate and death rate schedules alone." Does this mean that up until the

start of the Industrial Revolution humanity was powerless to improve its material conditions via factors such as technology, social organization, population control, etc.? Explain your answer.

8. The economies settled from northwestern Europe—the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand—were all resource rich. So why did they industrialize early? Why didn't they simply become gigantic Denmarks, shipping agricultural and other resource-based products to the European industrial powers in return for manufactures?

9. Economic historians have differing views on the importance of financial market development and credit intermediation in the process of industrialization and economic growth. Which arguments and studies do you find most convincing? Why?

Part IV

10. Modern macroeconomic history has tended to emphasize the use of natural experiments or microeconomic data to establish macroeconomic relationships. Describe two examples of such research. What are some of the strengths and weaknesses of this approach? For the examples you chose, discuss how successful the authors were in using the approach well. What could he or she have done better?

11. Inflation in the United States, which had been low on average in the 1950s, began rising steadily in the 1960s and reached very high levels in the 1970s. What are some of the leading explanations for this development? What is the evidence for the various explanations, and which do you find most persuasive? Why?

12. The causes of financial crises and the effects of crises on the economy are topics of great interest. What do you feel economic historians know about these issues and what questions remain unanswered? How does the experience of the United States and other countries since 2007 fit with the historical literature?