

ECONOMIC HISTORY FIELD EXAM

INSTRUCTIONS: ANSWER TWO QUESTIONS FROM PART I AND TWO QUESTIONS FROM PART II. YOU HAVE 3 HOURS.

PART I

1. One traditional view of modern economic growth sees it as appearing suddenly in Britain in the second half of the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century, driven by widespread, rapid technological change, and then continuing and spreading from there.

What, if any, truth is there to this view? Be sure to cite specific papers and findings in your answer.

2. In “Portage and Path Dependence,” Hoyt Bleakley and Jeffrey Lin claim to find very strong evidence of path dependence in the location of economic activity; in “Bones, Bombs, and Break Points: The Geography of Economic Activity,” Donald Davis and David Weinstein claim to find very strong evidence against path dependence. How should we reconcile these apparently conflicting findings? (For example, does one study have a major flaw that renders its conclusions invalid? Do the findings indicate that path dependence applies in certain cases but not others?) What additional work might shed light path dependence in the location of economic activity?

3. Digitization—or, more generally, dealing with large, archival data sets—is an important feature of much recent research in economic history. Based on examples of that research, argue for one of the following three propositions: (1) Digitization is leading to major advances in our understanding of the economics of the past; (2) Digitization is not yet leading to major advances in our understanding of the economics of the past, but it has the potential to do so; (3) Digitization will likely contribute only modestly to our understanding of the economics of the past.

PART II

4. In *Why Did Europe Conquer the World?* Philip Hoffman offers a controversial hypothesis to explain how and why Europe colonized other parts of the world rather than vice versa. Describe Hoffman’s hypothesis and the methods he uses to develop and test it. What are the alternatives to Hoffman’s interpretation? How convincing are they by comparison?

5. Robert Gordon's *The Rise and Fall of American Growth: The U.S. Standard of Living since the Civil War* has attracted much attention since the beginning of the year. Gordon argues that the rapid economic progress made in the 250 years starting around 1750 is likely to turn out to be a unique episode in human history. He then links this period of rapid growth to "three industrial revolutions." What are these three industrial revolutions, and how do they account for a quarter of a millennium of rapid growth in Gordon's interpretation? How convincing an account does Gordon provide of the economic past? How reliable a forecast does he provide of the future?

6. Stanley Engerman and Kenneth Sokoloff, in *Economic Development in the Americas since 1500*, analyze the role of endowments and institutions in comparative development experience. Describe their core argument. Describe its limitations. How does their argument differ from that of Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson in "Colonial Origins of Comparative Development" (*American Economic Review*)? How does it differ from the argument of other development economists like Jeffrey Sachs (who have commented on these same issues)?