Northwestern University  
Department of Economics  
Economics 420-1  
American Economic History  
Spring, 2002-03  

Time: TTh 9-11:00AM  
Place: Arthur Andersen Hall, Room 3204  
Instructor: Joseph P. Ferrie  
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Office Hours: TTh 2:30-4PM, and by appointment  

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course examines topics in the economic history of the United States. The first goal of the course is to make students aware of research on long-term factors in the development of the American economy that are overlooked in the contemporary focus of other courses—the rise of institutions, the appearance of markets for labor and capital, the growth and health of the population, the development of new technologies, the distribution of income and wealth, and the changing role of the government in the economy. The second goal is to familiarize students with the methods and materials of economic history. The course will require extensive input from the students, as the latter goal cannot be achieved without considerable hands-on experience. Great emphasis will be placed on students’ participation in discussions and students’ demonstration of the mastery of the tools of economic history in evaluating the materials presented in class and in completing a significant piece of original research using primary materials.

PREREQUISITES: 410, 411, and 480.

TEACHING METHOD: Two seminars per week.

EVALUATION: Participation in discussions (20%), four short (6-8 page) papers (40%), and a final paper (40%).

READINGS: There is no textbook for the course, but students with a weak background in U.S. history may wish to consult Jonathan Hughes and Louis P. Cain, *American Economic History* (6th ed., Addison-Wesley, 2003). A CD-ROM containing all of the readings will be available on the first day of class. A list of the readings is given below. All of the readings are required.

WEEKLY PAPERS: For every week except the first, students will prepare brief (3-4 page) essays in which they critically evaluate 2-3 of the assigned readings for the week, providing 1) an overview of the topic, 2) a critique of the sources and methods, 3) suggestions for extension and improvement, and 4) three discussion questions to guide our conversation about the topic. Students should divide the readings among themselves so that all selections are covered by at least one student. The essays should be e-mailed to ferrie@northwestern.edu by 5PM Monday and will be distributed via email by 9PM on Monday.

FINAL PAPER: Each student will complete a final paper that embodies significant original research using primary sources on a topic chosen in consultation with the instructor. The paper should be similar in scope and quality to an article in the *Journal of Economic History*. Students should consult with the instructor as early in the quarter as possible to choose a topic. Topics must be approved before the start of eighth week. Students will prepare a research prospectus (including a bibliography and outline) by the end of ninth week and email it to ferrie@northwestern.edu by 5PM on June 23rd. In the last week of the term, we will discuss students’ research proposals. Students will provide reports on the progress of their research and receive suggestions from their classmates during this week. The research proposals will be distributed via email by 9PM on before tenth week.
April 1: **Introduction: Mechanics of the Course**

April 3: **I. Methods and Materials of Economic History**

April 8-10: **II. Labor and Land in the Colonial and Early National Periods**

April 15-17: **III. Technological Change and Economic Growth**

April 22-24: **IV. Early Industrial Growth and the Rise of Industrial Labor Markets**

April 29-May 1: V. The Development of Capital Markets

May 6-8: VI. Immigration and Internal Migration

May 20-22: **VIII. Big Business and Big Government**


May 27-29: **IX. Macroeconomic Issues: Distribution and Stability**


June 3-5: **X. Discussion of Paper Proposals**