COURSE ESSAY

Date Due: November 28 (late penalty - 2% per day)

The essay can take several forms. It may be a review of the literature in which you are expected to bring you own critical insight to the topic. You are also encouraged to do primary research of your own in which you use primary or secondary data along with theory to help address a historical question. A good starting point is F.H. Leacy, Historical Statistics of Canada, Second Edition. For the U.S., the best general source is Historical Statistics of the United States: Millennial Edition. Primary material is kept in the Documents Unit of the Library (lower level - Stauffer). The essay should be 14-16 pages (double-spaced) and presented in professional journal style. See the Journal of Economic History or Explorations in Economic History. Either style is acceptable.

Part of the essay grade - 5% - will be based on a proposal which must be submitted no later than October 17. The proposal should be 300 to 500 words and outline what you plan to do in the paper.

Most of the suggested topics are related to material covered in the course. The required and optional readings on the course outline are a good starting point. Other suggested readings are provided below. The bibliographies of the papers can be an excellent source of additional readings.

Suggested Topics

1. An economic analysis of some aspect of Native American life and the North American fur trade

   This essay could deal with one of a range of topics, including the debate about the depletion of the beaver, the trading relationships between natives and European traders, the effect of the trade on the consumption patterns of natives, or some other aspect. Your discussion can refer both to the economic and the cultural-anthropological literature.

2. Indentured servitude

   You might discuss the nature of the economic relationships between the various parties (servant, English merchant or shipowner, American farmer) and what the contracts revealed about the indentured servants. You could also focus on the effects of uncertainty in the market. Another approach would be to discuss the changes that led to the demise of the system.
3. Conjectural income estimates

Mancall and Weiss have attempted to determine, conjecturally, the growth of income in the United States before 1800 including colonial times. Evaluate their work with a view to suggesting possible improvements to their estimates. Or, you could write an essay on income growth in Canada before 1870.


4. An aspect of slavery or the slave trade in the Americas

There is a large literature on slavery that includes such issues as the economic viability of the system, the physical treatment of slaves, the productivity of slave agriculture and how that changed over time, and the reasons for the end of slavery in the Americas. Write an essay that focuses on one of these questions. You might also write a paper dealing with the slave trade focusing on the economic relationships between the various parties.


5. The financing of railroads

Discuss the financing of the railroads in either the United States or Canadian. Consider such factors as the private and social profitability of particular railroads. You may focus on the role of government in railway finance.


6. Migration and farm settlement

This essay could deal with the major forces responsible for migration to Canada and the U.S. in the nineteenth century. You might also discuss the characteristics of immigrants and their success, or lack of success, once they settled in America. Related to the issue of migration is the process of farm settlement, which could also be a subject of your essay.

7. **Agricultural productivity change**

   Analyse the factors affecting the diffusion of agricultural innovations. You could discuss the relative importance of mechanical improvements and advances in the type of crops that were grown. Alternatively your essay could discuss the relative productivity of different agricultural systems.


8. **The cost of conflict**

   Apply the approach used by Lewis and Goldin in measuring the cost of the U.S. Civil War to evaluate the cost of some other war. In this essay you could deal with more a contemporary conflict.

9. **Health, heights, and income**

   There is a large anthropometric literature dealing with health, nutrition and income as reflected in recorded heights. Your essay could deal with one aspect of this literature.


10. **The Population of Native Americans**

     An analysis of the impact of European contact on aboriginal populations. This could include a study of the role of disease and the debate on how devastating it was. One issue you could study is the impact of smallpox.

     Reading: Carlos and Lewis, “Smallpox and Native American Mortality: The 1780s Smallpox Epidemic in the Hudson Bay Region.”

11. **A topic of your choice** subject to approval by the instructor.