

**Department of Economics
University of California
Berkeley CA 94720**

Economic History Field Exam, August 2020

Instructions: On the attached sheet you will find 12 questions. Please write essays on any four. It is recommended that you budget your time so that you can devote a quarter of total exam time to each question you answer. The exam is “open book” – you may consult whatever materials you wish. Be sure to write legibly.

1. The economic historians William Collins and Robert Margo found that the riots that followed the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968 visibly depressed property values in the most affected areas, not just in the short run but as late as the 1980s. Why might the effects have been so persistent. Do you think the same implications carry over to civil unrest in the United States in 2020? Why or why not?
2. The U.S. economy grew faster in the two decades 1953-75 than in any other 20 year period in its history. What are the main explanations that economic historians marshal to explain this exceptional performance? Which explanations are most convincing? Can the same factors explaining why the economy grew so rapidly in this period also explain why it slowed down subsequently?
3. Caitlin Rosenthal argues that many of the modern accounting and management innovations commonly attributed to the modern multidivisional manufacturing firm in fact developed as much as a century earlier on Southern cotton and tobacco plantations. What evidence does she develop to make the case. Do you find that evidence convincing?
4. There is a conventional view and a revisionist view (associated with Tamas Vonyo) of the Wirtschaftswunder (the period of “miracle” growth in Germany in the third quarter of the 20th century). What are these two views? How do they differ? Which do you find convincing, and why?
5. An enduring controversy in the literature of development economics concerns the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of foreign aid. What was South Vietnam’s foreign aid experience in from the mid-1950s through mid-1970s? What can that experience tell us about the (in)effectiveness of foreign aid more generally?
6. Milton Friedman made the argument for abandoning the draft and moving to an all-voluntary army. What were the effects on the U.S. economy of doing so? Does the evidence support Friedman’s arguments? Were there other effects he didn’t consider?
7. The great transformation in wealth and productivity in human history sees the shift, at least in some parts of the world, from a very poor Malthusian to a very rich modern post-industrial economy. Three watersheds have been proposed for this transformation: the coming of the Commercial Revolution around 1500-1600, the coming of the Industrial Revolution 1730-1800, and the coming of modern economic growth 1850-1900. What are the principal arguments for seeing each of these watersheds as key to this transformation?
8. The great transformation in demography in human history sees the shift from a world with high fertility, very low life expectancy, and for the most part a very pronounced gender division of labor maintained by strong patriarchy to one of long life expectancy, low average fertility, a much less pronounced division of labor, and weaker patriarchy. What are the principal hypotheses proposed as to how these pieces of this transformation all fit together.
9. It used to be the case that that Great Depression was viewed as a unique, one-shot macroeconomic catastrophe. Is it still possible to maintain that view, given what has happened to the global economy in the past two decades and what we have learned about economic history in the same time period?

10. Fifty years ago economic historians saw a “Kuznets curve”: a one-time rise in inequality with the coming of the Industrial Revolution, and then a return to a much lower inequality pattern with the coming of the era of social democracy. In light of the work of Thomas Piketty and others on historical income distributions and of income and wealth trends since 1970 or so, how does this picture of the broad pattern of inequality history need to be revised?
11. To what extent has there been progress and development in governments’ and central banks’ knowledge about and ability to manage the international and their national monetary and financial systems, and to what extent have governments simply been repeatedly confronting an ongoing cycle of dilemmas in their choices of institutions and policies, with no fully satisfactory or permanently stable resolutions possible?
12. Around 1980 the rate of productivity growth in the global north roughly halved from the 3% per year that had characterized the post-WWII generation. Growth has not resumed its previous pace. To what extent have economic historians concluded that this slowdown was the result of a single global process, and to what extent have they judged that slower productivity growth over the past two generations was simply the result of one piece of bad luck following another?