Ph.D. Qualifying Examination
UCLA Department of Economics

Spring 2003
Four Hours

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION IN ECONOMIC HISTORY

Answer four of the following questions.

1. There has recently been a revival of interest among economists in the sources of geographic patterns in per capita income, and in whether such patterns stem from systematic factors in the evolution of institutions or are rooted in factor endowments. How much have we learned to date from this line of investigation? What in your view are the most important findings (or other contributions) to have come out of this literature, and how has our understanding of the relative importance of factor endowments, institutions, and culture in accounting for differences in economic performance been advanced (if at all)? If you were planning to work in this area, what sort of research program would you pursue? Explain.

2. Because the United States successfully made the transition from underdevelopment to world economic leadership, scholars have long scrutinized its history for ideas about policies that might help less developed nations today. The literature is wide ranging and has covered topics ranging from the role of leading sectors like railroads to tariff policy, patent rights, antitrust policy, banking structure, public education, etc. Pick at least three such policy areas, review critically the scholarly literature on each, and discuss the lessons that might be drawn from this experience to help other nation's achieve higher levels of development.

3. In a widely cited but controversial paper, North and Weingast argue that a political commitment to property rights through divided and limited government is a necessary and sufficient condition for financial development. Review the historical evidence relevant to the argument, and explain you position in the debate. In doing so feel free to draw on material from either course.

4. The results of Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman's calculations of total factor productivity for different classes of farms are often regarded as providing important support for the interpretation of the economic impact of slavery on the development of the southern economy that Fogel puts forward in his book, Without Consent or Contract. What are those results, and what do you think can and cannot be inferred from them about the economic impact of slavery? In what ways are they relevant to the debate over whether the institution of slavery retarded long-run economic growth in the South? Do they fully resolve the issue? What other evidence do you view as of fundamental significance for upholding or rejecting their view -- or understanding the impact of slavery on development more generally? Explain.

5. In a recent book (that was not assigned) S.R. Epstein argues that in Medieval Europe strong centralized governments were key to growth. Only these governments had the wherewithal to tax efficiently and provide the public goods necessary for expansion. Weak governments in contrast simply preyed on their economies, and private institutions proved were ineffective substitutes for public ones. To what extent can this account be extended to more recent times? Please analyze the connection between efficient taxation, the provision of public goods and economic growth-in the light of the material covered in the sequence.

6. A generation ago the Industrial Revolution was seen as a sharp and critical discontinuity in the growth rate of British per capita output. Today most economic historians of Europe hold that growth during the late 18th- and early 19th centuries was slow, poorly distributed, and the continuation of at least a century of prior agricultural and commercial expansion. Such a record would seem to contrast sharply with what economic historians of the U.S. think happened there in the early- to mid-19th century. Macro economists, moreover, are increasingly coming to view the Industrial Revolution as the key event in the history of economic growth. What accounts for the revisionist interpretation of the record of British economic growth among economic historians? Can this view be reconciled with the views of macro economists? Can this view be reconciled with the estimates of productivity growth in the U.S. during this period, which suggest much more rapid and balanced rates of productivity growth in manufacturing there than in Britain? Explain.