Econ 242: The American Century

Course Overview:
This course applies the theoretical tools of economics to understand how the United States overtook leading European countries at the end of the nineteenth century and maintained this economic lead over the next hundred years. Among other topics, we will consider the roles of mass production and big business, public health improvements, and the relatively early and widespread availability of public education. We will also discuss some of the problems that Americans faced as the nation grew, including racial disparities and economic inequality.

Course Requirements:
Read the assigned readings, attend each class session and participate in class discussions. Papers marked with a ** on the syllabus are the designated “discussion paper” for the session. Students must email two short questions about the discussion paper to me each week by noon on the day before class (lboustan@econ.ucla.edu). In addition, each student must give one oral presentation summarizing and critiquing a discussion paper during the term (no more than ten minutes).

Written Assignments:
Students will be graded on their presentations, class participation, and on one of the following two assignments (due Friday, December 2):

Assignment 1: Write two referee reports of the starred discussion papers on the syllabus. Each should be four pages in length (double spaced, 12-point font, 1-inch margins). The first page should summarize the main methods and findings of the paper, emphasizing its positive contribution to the literature. The final three pages should provide practical critiques of the paper. Each critique should be separately numbered.

OR

Assignment 2: Write a prospectus for a research paper that is influenced by reading in US economic history. Students may pair this assignment with a paper in another field but they must explain the explicit connection to US economic history. The prospectus should be eight to ten pages in length (double spaced, 12-point font, 1-inch margins). It should describe a research problem, make a case for its analytical significance, briefly survey the relevant literature, pinpoint a body of source material that can be used to explore the problem, and outline a viable methodological approach.
Topics
1. Second Industrial Revolution
2. Age of Mass Migration
3. Fertility/public health
4. Education/women’s labor force participation
5. Racial convergence
6. Corporate governance and banking
7. Productivity
8. Microeconomics of the Great Depression
9. Social mobility/social programs
10. Inequality

Schedule of Class Meetings and Reading Assignments

September 22: Second Industrial Revolution

Assigned Readings:

Related Readings:
September 29: **Age of Mass Migration**

Assigned readings:

Related reading:

October 6: **Fertility/public health**

Assigned Readings:

Related readings:

**A. Public health**

**B. Fertility**

**October 13: Education/Women’s labor force participation**

**Assigned readings:**

**Related readings:**

**A. Education**

**B. Female Labor Force Participation**


**October 20: Racial convergence**

Assigned Readings:


Related readings:


**October 27: Corporate finance and banking**

Assigned readings:


Related Readings:

November 3: Productivity
Assigned readings:

Related readings:

**November 10: Microeconomics of the Great Depression**

**Assigned readings:**

**Related readings:**
November 17: **Social mobility and income inequality**

Assigned readings:

Related readings:

**A. Social Mobility**

**B. Inequality**
December 1: **Social programs and social insurance**

Assigned readings

Related readings