

Economics 113
Referee Report Assignment
(Due Wednesday, November 27 at the beginning of class)

Department of Economics
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The purpose of this assignment is to introduce you to published research in economic history. While a textbook summarizes the main results of thousands of published articles and books, it is important to see how economic history research is actually done. The referee report assignment is due in paper form at the **beginning of class on Wednesday, November 27**. It is worth 75 points (15 percent of your course grade). If you miss the deadline at the beginning of class, but provide a hard copy of the report to me later in the period or via e-mail as a PDF file (e-mailed to msiegler@csus.edu) at any time on November 27, then there will be an automatic 15-point deduction (60 possible points). The deduction will increase to 30 points on November 28, 45 points on November 29, 60 points on November 30, and reports will not be accepted after November 30. Details on the composition and length of the report are described below.

What is a Referee Report?

A referee report is a critical part of the peer-review process in academic research. When an article is submitted to an academic journal for possible publication, the editor of the journal sends out the paper to several experts who are familiar with the topic and who can evaluate the contributions and limitations of the submitted article. Each referee writes a report, which is the basis for a recommendation to the editor on whether to accept the paper for publication, to suggest that the authors revise and later resubmit the paper for publication, or to reject the paper for publication.

Since each paper below has already been published, you do not need to provide this summary recommendation, but your report should consist of all of other aspects of a referee report. Your report is intended for the authors of the paper and to the journal editor. It should be approximately three double-spaced pages in length, and it should include the following parts:

- A summary of the paper, which discusses the main research question(s), the methodology used by the authors, and the conclusions and contributions of the paper.
- A discussion of whether the question or questions asked are important (or not) and whether you find the paper convincing or not (and why?)
- A discussion of the concerns you have with the paper. These concerns could be related to the data being used, the empirical methods, sample selection issues (do the data seem to be a representative sample?), possible alternative explanations for the results that the authors do not consider (or do not consider sufficiently), and any other weaknesses of the paper.
- Finally, a referee report is meant to be constructive criticism, so, whenever possible, provide possible suggestions for improvement.

For more detailed guidelines on writing a referee report, see:

- Berk, Jonathan B., Campbell R. Harvey, and David Hirshleifer, 2015, "Preparing a Referee Report: Guidelines and Perspectives," available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2547191> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2547191>

Possible Articles to Review

As is discussed in the Preface of the textbook, the course is organized around four main themes: economic growth, distributional issues, economic fluctuations, and the relationship between markets and government. The articles listed below have been recently published in either *Explorations in Economic History* or *The Journal of Economic History*, which are the two leading journals in the discipline, and each article (or articles) fits into one of these main themes. All of the articles below can be found in Canvas by the author's or authors' last name(s). Please select one of the following four themes for your referee report:

Theme 1: Economic Growth

There has been substantial debate and concern about the future of economic growth. The two papers below are written by two experts, Robert J. Gordon and Joel Mokyr:

- Gordon, Robert J., 2018, "Declining American Growth despite Ongoing Innovation, *Explorations in Economic History* 69, 1-12.
- Mokyr, Joel, 2018, "The Past and the Future of Innovation: Some Lessons from Economic History," *Explorations in Economic History* 69, 13-26.

In this case, **your report on this this theme will cover both papers** in a “compare-and-contrast” manner, but it must still include your reasoned judgements described in the bullet points on the top of page 2. While reading two papers is more than the other themes below, these two papers are the least technical.

Theme 2: Distributional Issues

The paper below is international and comparative in scope, and it examines the causes of long-run economic inequality in the United States and other economies:

- Bengtsson, Erik, and Daniel Waldenstrom, 2018, “Capital Shares and Income Inequality: Evidence from the Long Run,” *Journal of Economic History* 78(3), 712-743.

Theme 3: Economic Fluctuations

While much has been written about the “Quantitative Easing” conducted by the Federal Reserve after the Great Recession, which began in December 2007, there was another period of Quantitative Easing during the Great Depression of the 1930s as described in the following paper:

- Jaremski, Matthew, and Gabriel Mathy, 2018, “How was the Quantitative Easing Program of the 1930s Unwound?,” *Explorations in Economic History* 69, 27-49.

Theme 4: The Relationship between Markets and Governments

After the 1906 earthquake devastated San Francisco, city planners were largely able to “start from scratch” in terms of city planning. This paper provides an example of a “natural experiment”:

- Siodla, James, 2017, “Clean slate: Land-use Changes in San Francisco after the 1906 Disaster,” *Explorations in Economic History* 68, 1-16.