

Critical Review Assignment

Econ 5470 Spring 2006

Your first writing assignment in this class will involve finding an article from the professional economic history literature and writing a summary and critical evaluation of the article. The first thing to do is think about what general topic area you want to specialize in for both this assignment and your research paper assignment: Trade? Banking? Immigration? Education? Health? You may want to pick a topic related to other economics classes you are taking. You might also look for a topic by skimming through the textbook. Another place to start is the Encyclopedia of Economic and Business History available on the EH.Net site (www.eh.net/encyclopedia). You may NOT review an encyclopedia essay for your critical review. Rather, you should use these essays to get background information on various topics.

The next thing to do is find an article that deals with an historical aspect of your topic. One good way to start looking for an article is to go to the Economics Research Guide prepared by the Marriott Library staff. The address is <http://www.lib.utah.edu/ResGuides/economics.html>. You can also get there by going to the library home page, clicking on "Research Guides" (under "Help with Research"), then clicking "Economics." A third route is by going to the WebCT course page and clicking on "Writing Resources." In the research guide, you will find many resources, including many indexes and databases for economic research. You should probably use either "Econlit" or "America: History and Life" for this assignment, though some of the other databases listed on this page will also be useful.

Your article should probably come from one of the following journals:

The Journal of Economic History	Agricultural History
Explorations in Economic History	Business History Review
Social Science History	Research in Economic History
The Journal of Interdisciplinary History	The William and Mary Quarterly
Labor History	The American Historical Review

Articles from other professional journals in economics and history may also be acceptable. In some cases, chapters from collective volumes may be acceptable. However, check with me first if your article does not come from the above list. Note that many of these journals publish book reviews, but it will not be acceptable to choose a book review as the article that you wish to critique.

You should keep two additional things in mind as you look for an article to critique. First, it is your responsibility to find something that you feel you can interpret. Each of the listed journals contains a variety of kinds of articles – some highly statistical or mathematical in content, others more narrative in approach. Start looking early enough so that you will have time to find a piece that you are interested in and comfortable with. Second, your grade (both on the critical review and on the research paper) will depend in part on whether you go beyond material that we have covered in class. Your topic may be closely related to something we have discussed, but for this assignment you should review an article that we have not already discussed in detail in class.

Once you have found an article, you will need to figure out whether or not the library carries the journal you are interested in. You can find this out by going to the Marriott Library home page, clicking "Library Catalog – What We Own," and doing a title search. You will also frequently find links for "search the catalog at your library" or "local holdings information" within the article databases. These will take you directly to the information you need for locating the article. For this assignment, it is NOT a good idea to START your search in the Marriott Library catalog. You are looking for an article, not a book. (It will make sense to start with the

library catalog when we get to the research paper assignment.) It is also NOT a good idea to start by searching the web using Google or any other search engine. This kind of search will produce a list of lots of different kinds of sources, some useful and some not. The most efficient way to find what you are looking for – a professional piece of academic writing in economic history – is to stick with the databases available through the library.

On **February 7**, you will turn in a page listing your general area of interest and giving the COMPLETE citation for the article you will review (author's name, article title, journal name, journal volume, number, and date, and page numbers), along with a one-paragraph summary of the article. I will return this to you by February 14 and will also discuss with you any questions I might have about the piece you have chosen. On **February 21**, you will come to class with **TWO COPIES** of a rough draft of your essay. We will read these essays in “research groups” in class, and you will get some critical comments from a student working on a topic related to your own. Then, on **February 28**, you will turn in your critical review (about 5 to 7 pages), along with the peer evaluation form that you will receive on February 21 and a statement regarding how you have revised your paper as a result of your reviewer’s comments. In addition, you must submit your critical review to “Turnitin.com” to be checked for proper citation of sources (instructions for doing this will be distributed separately).

Your essay should answer the following questions:

- What is the author's purpose? What is the central question they wish to answer?
- Why should we care, in the author's view? Is the author revising the conventional wisdom, adding to an ongoing debate, evaluating a new source of data, ...?
- What is the author's “method”? Narrative history and case studies? Formal economic modeling? Quantitative analysis?
- Outline the author's argument: What do they conclude and why?
- Critique the author's work: Is the question worth asking? Are you persuaded by their answer? What is the strongest/weakest aspect of the argument/evidence? What questions remain for you? What would be a good extension or elaboration of this work? Your essay MUST include some original critique of this type to earn a good grade.

The final draft of your critical review should (again) include a complete citation of the article you are reviewing. Also, all quoted material must be identified with quotation marks and a page number. (You are not required to use any other sources in your critical review, but if you do, you must cite those sources completely and accurately, and you must of course identify all quoted material appropriately. See me if you have any questions about this.)

Accessing Literature Databases from Off-Campus:

For both the critical review assignment and the research paper, you will need to make use of some of the literature databases available through the library, particularly Econlit and America: History and Life. If you want to access these databases from off-campus, using an off-campus internet service provider, you may need to set up a “proxy server connection.” To find out how to set up such a connection, go to the “Marriott Library Remote Access” link on the front page of the WebCT site. Also, note that, in the end, you will likely have to go to the library to find the journal you need and to copy the relevant article, so you may find it convenient to use computers in the library to get to the databases anyway.