

The New Comparative Economic History: Essays in Honor of Jeffrey G. Williamson. *Edited by Timothy J. Hatton, Kevin H. O'Rourke, and Alan M. Taylor.* Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press. x + 417 pp. References, notes, index. Cloth, \$40.00. ISBN: 978-0-262-08361-4.

Reviewed by Stanley L. Engerman

This volume contains fifteen papers that were first presented in November 2005 at Harvard University as a Festschrift to honor Jeffrey G. Williamson, Laird Bell Professor of Economics. The papers are by students, coauthors, and colleagues of Williamson who share his interest in the New Comparative Economic History. Williamson, long a pioneering figure in such studies, has numerous publications to his credit and has engaged in many interactions with other scholars. The nature of Williamson's contribution to the study of economic history is vividly described in an introduction by the three editors, Timothy F. Hatton, Kevin H. O'Rourke, and Alan M. Taylor, while other aspects of Williamson's participation in the intellectual life at Harvard are detailed in an afterword by former president Lawrence H. Summers.

Reflecting Williamson's interests, the essays fall into three categories: studies of comparative economic history; analyses of the behavior of several countries in order to discuss specific economic issues; and examinations of price and wage convergence. Featured in the first group is a paper by Robert C. Allen on real wages in India and in England in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Allen concludes that the earlier position of relative equality in Indian wages declined sharply in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, opening "a substantial gap" (p. 21) between the two countries. In his long-term study, "Inequality and Poverty in Latin America," Leandro Prados de la Escosura gathers recent data, extrapolating from them to argue that although inequality persevered, "absolute poverty experienced a long-run decline in Latin America from the late nineteenth century on" (p. 311). George R. Boyer's essay combines wage data, nonmonetary measures of living standards, and the Human Development Index, applying them to eleven European nations plus four other countries, including the United States. Boyer finds that the nonincome measures converged on the United States, as did real wages, and he uses the changes in these patterns to explain the pattern of

migration from Europe to the United States between 1870 and 1930. In the single paper on a contemporary subject, Gayle J. Allard and Peter H. Lindert discuss the impact of various labor-market institutions, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), on jobs, productivity, and labor-force participation since the 1960s, arguing that the social effects of the policies promoted by these institutions should receive the same serious consideration as their direct economic effects. Cormac Ó Gráda compares two growth patterns—in Britain and the Netherlands between 1500 and 1900, and in Italy and Ireland between 1950 and 2000—to ask about the benefits (and costs) of alternative routes to economic development.

The essays that tackle international issues raise interesting questions. A detailed study by Alan L. Olmstead and Paul W. Rhode describes the geographic spread of wheat production in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, pointing out that wheat was “constantly being reformulated to fit local countries . . . because of changing disease and pest environments” (p. 134). Richard S. Grossman, in his study of the evolution of bank capital from 1834 to 1940 in the United States and western Europe, notes, among other findings, that there were declining capital-to-asset ratios over time, suggestive of a possible increase in banking efficiency. A study by Holger C. Wolf and Tarik M. Yousef of the factors that led to the abandonment of the gold standard in the 1930s draws upon considerable data and a rich literature to describe why the number of countries adhering to that standard rose from five in 1919 to forty-three in 1928, before falling to five in 1935. The other essays in this section deal with political issues affecting international trade and immigration. Kevin H. O’Rourke and Alan M. Taylor examine the link between democracy and natural resources, and they point to the variability in results across countries and the general importance of country-specific factors. Differing attitudes toward both immigration and imports were tabulated from data compiled for the International Social Survey Programme and were also based on the authors’ knowledge of various countries’ characteristics, contributing to the paradox that Williamson himself examines in collaboration with Timothy L. Hatton.

The two studies of price convergence yield uncertain results. Giovanni Federico and Karl Gunnar Persson’s study of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century world wheat market shows, in some measure, the importance of quality differences and domestic transport costs. Using a broader list of commodities and covering a long period (1500–1800), Süleyman Özmucur and Şevket Pamuk argue for “the absence of price convergence and market integration

in long-distance and international trade.” Nevertheless, they suggest that, even in the absence of long-distance convergence, there may have been convergence in “short- and medium-range domestic or regional trade” (p. 81). The study of regional wage convergence in the United States during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries demonstrates that, in more recent years, southerners have caught up with northerners to some degree in education and income levels. By 2000, the gaps between workers inside and outside the South in average educational attainment, income, and returns to education had dwindled by historical standards.

The two remaining essays deal with specific cases that do not fit into broad categories. Based on numerical exercises for the British Industrial Revolution, Gregory Clark argues that population growth was more important than technological advances in explaining British growth. In a thoughtful analysis of Jewish migration from Russia, Leah Platt Boustan discusses the relative roles of economic forces in the United States and Russia. Her conclusion that the persecution of the Russian Jews accounted for only part of the magnitude and timing of Jewish migration between 1881 and 1924 brings this event closer to more traditional explanations of transcontinental migrations.

As in all such collections, the essays are of varying quality and interest, and not every essay will appeal to every reader. Nevertheless, their average quality is high, making the book a fitting tribute to the interests and methods of Jeffrey Williamson.

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