American Colonial Incomes 1650-1774

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ABSTRACT

We have constructed a social table for 1774, one which offers estimates of average incomes by occupation, gender, race, slave/free status, urban/rural location, the four colonial zones (New England, Middle Colonies, Upper South, Lower South), and original 13 aggregates. This incomes benchmark and another for 1800 have been published recently (Lindert and Williamson September 2013) where they were used to assess the economic disaster 1774-1800. Instead of looking forward from 1774, this paper will look backward across the colonial era using evidence documenting trends in wages, wealth, and farm income to extend that 1774 benchmark back to 1650.
Archomania. The Place of Venality in French Private and Government Finances

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ABSTRACT

This paper studies the size and significance of the system of venal offices in France in the last two decades before the Revolution. Venality was widespread and it is commonly agreed that it constituted a major outlet for private savings. However, the only detailed evidence available to date comes from regional or profession-specific samples for the late 17th and 18th century. We use instead data from a much larger cross-section of offices spread across occupations and locations in France around the early 1770s. With this dataset we are able to answer a number of questions about the economic significance and resilience of the venal system during its last decades and the immediate post-revolutionary period.
Self-Selection of Immigrants on the Basis of Living Standards:
Evidence from the Stature of Italian Immigrants at Ellis
Island, 1907--1925

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ABSTRACT

We study immigrant self-selection using data on Italians entering the United States between 1907 and 1925. Exploiting the relationship between average stature and living standards, we test for self-selection by comparing the heights of migrants to the height distributions of their respective birth cohorts and provinces of origin. We find that the average Italian immigrant was shorter than the average Italian of the same birth cohort---suggesting negative self-selection at the national level---but taller than the average Italian of the same birth cohort and province of origin---indicating positive self-selection at the local level. This difference is driven by positive self-selection in shorter provinces and birth cohorts, which were primarily located in south Italy, and which were the origins of a disproportionately large share of immigrants. We also find evidence consistent with positive self-selection being driven by liquidity constraints that can be moderated through chain migration.
The Economic Payoff of Name Americanization

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ABSTRACT

We examine the impact of the Americanization of names on the labor market outcomes of migrants. We construct a novel longitudinal data set of naturalization records in which we track a complete sample of migrants who naturalize by 1930. We find that migrants who Americanized their names experienced larger occupational upgrading. Some, such as those who changed to very popular American names like John or William, obtained gains in occupation-based earnings of at least 14%. We show that these estimates are causal effects by using an index of linguistic complexity based on Scrabble points as an instrumental variable that predicts name Americanization. We conclude that the tradeoff between individual identity and labor market success was present since the early making of modern America.
Do Markets Reward Constitutional Reform? Lessons From America's State Debt Crisis

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ABSTRACT

How do sovereigns gain favorable access to credit? Some have argued that sovereigns will be rewarded for adopting institutional constraints that reduce payment uncertainty, but others remain skeptical that institutions credibly constrain government behavior. This paper uses the quasi-experimental setting of America’s 1840s state debt crisis to identify whether markets reward constitutional reform. Following the default of nine states and territories, eleven states adopted constitutions constraining their ability to tax, borrow, and charter corporations. I find that defaulting states were rewarded with lower borrowing costs and increased access to credit after adopting constitutional constraints, but I find no effect for states that did not default. This suggests that sovereigns with tarnished reputations could benefit from adopting constitutional constraints to signal their commitment to a set of policies.
Local Economic Impacts of Coal Mining in the U.S. from 1870 to 1970

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ABSTRACT

Many recent studies have attempted to understand the economic consequences of natural resource extraction. This paper will analyze the economic consequences of U.S. mining activity from 1870 to 1970 and will focus on long run changes to local economies due to the boom and bust nature of extracting natural resources. I have obtained annual county level mining production data in the U.S. from the late 1860s to 1970 and have combined it with detailed county level decennial and manufacturing census information. Obtaining annual mining production data enables the creation of a cumulative measure of mining activity in a county. Preliminary analysis has found that current year coal production decreases the amount of manufacturing workers in the county. Initial analysis has also found cumulative coal production has a negative and significant impact on median family income at the county level in the U.S. from 1950 to 1970.
"The Dust Was Long in Settling": Human Capital and the Lasting Impact of the American Dust Bowl

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Co-authors:

ABSTRACT

I use variation in childhood exposure to the Dust Bowl, an environmental shock to health and income, as a natural experiment to explain variation in adult human capital. I find that the Dust Bowl produced significant adverse impacts in later life, especially when exposure was in utero, increasing rates of poverty and disability, and decreasing rates of fertility and college completion. Dependence on agriculture exacerbates these effects, suggesting that the Dust Bowl was most damaging via the destruction of farming livelihoods. This collapse of farm incomes, however, had the positive effect of reducing demand for child farm labor and thus decreasing the opportunity costs of secondary schooling, as evidenced by increases in high school completion amongst the exposed.
Impact Of Migration On Infant Health: Evidence From The Great Migration

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ABSTRACT

The Great Migration of African Americans from the rural South to the urban North entailed a significant change in the health environment during a time when access to medical care and public health infrastructure became increasingly important. We create a new dataset that links individual infant death certificates to parental characteristics to assess the impact of migration to Northern cities on infant mortality. The new dataset allows the paper’s key innovation, which is to control for selection into migration and detailed parental characteristics. Given that infant health has a long-lasting impact on adult outcomes, the results shed light on whether and how the Great Migration contributed to African Americans’ secular gains in health and income during the 20th century.
Finding the Fat: The Relative Impact of Budget Fluctuations on African-American Schools

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ABSTRACT

On average, per pupil expenditures were much lower in African-American schools than in white schools during segregation. Little is known, however, about how Southern school boards divided the proceeds of exogenous shifts in school budgets. In Georgia, a county’s share of the Common School Fund was determined every five years based on the proportion of the school-age population residing in the county. Infrequent adjustments to changes in the distribution of school-age children resulted in significant shocks to per pupil expenditures at the county level in adjustment years. Exploiting this exogenous variation in funding, I employ a differences-in-differences strategy to investigate how the relative quality of education for African Americans changed with the level of state funding for education. Preliminary results suggest whites, rather than African Americans, bore the brunt of budget cuts, perhaps because there was little fat to trim from the budgets of African-American schools.
Variations in the price and quality of grain, 1750-1914: quantitative evidence and empirical implications

Liam Brunt

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ABSTRACT

Brunt and Cannon (2013) argue that interpretation of historic grain price data is hazardous owing to systematic variation in grain quality - both cross sectionally and over varying time horizons (intra-year, inter-year and long run). We quantify these four aspects of quality variation in England, 1750-1914. First, we show that grain quality is approximated by bushel weight. We then show that cross sectional and long run variation are substantial and problematic, possibly generating erroneous inference regarding market integration and cost of living changes. We examine international quality differentials and plot their changes over time. By contrast, intra-year and inter-year variation are relatively small and may be controlled for more easily.
Health Height and the Household: England and Wales at the Turn of the 20th Century

Tim Hatton

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ABSTRACT

We examine the health and height of men born in England and Wales in the 1890s who enlisted in the army at the time of the First World War. We take the heights of a sample of servicemen and use other information from the army service records to find the recruits as children in the 1901 census. Econometric results indicate that adult height was negatively related to the number of children in the household as well as to the share of earners, the degree of crowding, and positively to socioeconomic class. Adding the characteristics of the local registration district has little effect on the household-level effects. But local conditions were important, in particular the industrial character of the district, local housing conditions and the female illiteracy rate. We interpret these as representing the negative effect on height of the local disease environment. The results suggest that changing conditions at both household and locality levels contributed to the increase in height and health in the following decades.
Sovereign Default in Ireland, 1932

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ABSTRACT

This paper uses a newly constructed database of daily sovereign debt prices from the Dublin Stock Exchange to examine the financial market response to the Irish government’s ‘default’ of 1932. In March of that year, the Irish government declared that it would no longer make transfers to the British government in respect of pre-independence land bonds. These transfers were an obligation of the Free State as part of the deal under which Ireland gained independence. The capital raised by the issuance of land bonds was loaned to Irish tenant-farmers to purchase the land they occupied, in the form of a long-term mortgage. As part of the deal under which Ireland gained independence during the 1920s, the newly created Free State administered the collection and transfer of the farmers’ bi-annual mortgage repayments to the British government.