What Data Sources are Available?

The paper does not require the use of quantitative information. You may want to use qualitative information. However, some of you may want to do a statistical analysis using micro data. All of you will need to know which published sources are available and where. Therefore read on.

Note that finding primary sources is easiest for the United States. You can find a fair number of primary sources for Britain and somewhat fewer for France. Other countries present even greater difficulties. Keep this in mind in thinking about topics. Students who end up focusing on the 1970s onwards because they cannot find earlier data tend not to do well on the paper.

Machine Readable Data

Hardly any non-US data are available. Most of the US data date from the end of the nineteenth century onwards.

Most publicly available data are stored with ICPSR. To browse their collection to http://www.icpsr.umich.edu. To actually download the data from any MIT machine go to the Harvard-MIT Data Center (accessible from the libraries web page).

Available ICPSR data:

1. published census material
4. voting data
5. slave sales, prices, and appraisals
6. military muster rolls
7. wills, probate, and tax records (including English)
8. payroll records of selected companies (e.g. Ford)
9. arrests, strikes, and violent activity in France and Britain
10. aggregate statistics for Europe
Data archives similar to ICPSR exist in other countries as well. See the Council of European Social Science Data Archives, http://www.nsd.uib.no/Cessda/. The History Data Service (http://ahds.ac.uk/history/index.htm), part of the Archives at the University of Essex has a particularly rich collection of historical data. To obtain a dataset you need either a friend abroad or you need to pay for the data.

Other data:


2. http://eh.net, directly downloadable or an author contact - collection includes Europe and ranges from time series data to various micro datasets such as US surveys of workers


4. http://www.cpe.uchicago.edu, Union Army veterans and assorted public health datasets

5. http://www.demog.berkeley.edu, aggregate vital statistics data for various countries and Prussian (1875-1914) and Croatian (1700-1900) micro data on baptisms, marriages, and burials


9. Adriana Lleras-Muney’s (Princeton University) compulsory US child attendance and labor laws and state characteristics

Other data can be obtained by directly contacting individuals.

This list will mainly be useful if you are working on the nineteenth century or later.

Historical newspaper databases include Proquest’s New York Times Historical Archives and Historical Wall Street Journal and are accessible from the libraries web page.

Note that MIT keeps older material, including published census volumes, in its Retrospective Collection (RSC). Primary sources are also available at Harvard’s Widener, Littauer (federal and state government reports), Lamont (census volumes), Guttman (education volumes), and Baker (business history) libraries. Most Littauer volumes will not
show up on the online catalogue. The Boston Public Library contains Massachusetts state reports.

You may need to use inter-library to order books from other libraries. Be sure that you allow plenty of time. A good way to search computerized information for all U.S. libraries is through WorldCat.

Three volumes located in Dewey reference that you should be familiar with are:


Other sources you might find useful are:

1. historical published US census information: http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus

2. digitized US Statistical Yearbooks: http://www2.census.gov/prod2/statcomp/index.htm

3. digitized US census volumes (incomplete): http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/index.htm

4. STAT-USA, NIPA numbers and more, accessible from the MIT libraries web page

5. BLS CPI series: http://www.bls.gov/


21. censuses of population and statistical yearbooks

22. assorted reports from government agencies

23. price series that can be obtained from private sources such as railroad freight rates and Montgomery Ward’s catalogues