

Winner of the 2023 Nobel Prize for Economics

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The so-called Nobel Prize in Economics (The Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel) for 2023 has once again been awarded to a single person after six years. She is the third woman in the prize's history – the American economist and historian Claudia Goldin (*1946), whose home base is Harvard University in Cambridge. It is the seventh Nobel Prize in Economics for Harvard University. The number of economics Nobel laureates has reached ninety-three since 1969. US affiliation is stated or co-stated for seventy-two laureates.

The official justification for Goldin's award is "*for having advanced our understanding of women's labour market outcomes*". It points to pioneering achievements in the analysis of the role of women in the work process and progressively highlights the importance of the issue for society as a whole. Goldin is credited with uncovering the key drivers of gender differences in labour markets and the barriers to be overcome. The research was expected to provide the first comprehensive account of women's earnings and participation in labour markets in over a century. Goldin was going to identify the causes of change and the primary sources of the persistent gender gap in labour markets. Resulting in conclusions about the persistence of gender gaps, the significant under-representation of women on the global labour market, or that if women work, they earn less than men.

In the context of the 2023 prize winner, the question arises (again): Does the prize-winning issue really "*shake up*" economic science? Does it resonate globally and locally through whole societies in the chaotic 21st century of growing contradictions, deepening crises, threats of war and other confrontations? Critical voices from different positions point to economic science, which is not very comforting and often slips into researching pseudo-problems or "*gloriously*" discovering long-standing and well-known banalities. There are also warnings about the ideological bias of feminism and genderism or the danger of constructing a supposedly masculine or feminine

world, including, for example, supposedly masculine and feminine research topics. Goldin's contribution to economic research is clear, but is it so original as to justify awarding the highest economic prize alone to the first woman?

Goldin's life and career

Claudia Dale Goldin was born in New York City on 14 May 1946. She grew up in the Bronx, admired archaeology as a child, and became passionate about bacteriology in high school. She entered college intending to study microbiology. Gradually, however, she discovered the allure of economic and historical research in industrial organization and regulation areas. She was educated at Cornell University from 1963–1967 (B.A. in Economics, 1967) and studied at the University of Chicago from 1967–1972 (M.A. in Economics, 1969; Ph.D. in Economics, 1972). She focused on industrial organization and labour economics, eventually turning to economic history. Her dissertation topic, under the supervision of 1993 Economic Nobel Laureate R. W. Fogel, focused on slavery.

Goldin taught economics as an Assistant Professor at the University of Wisconsin (1971–1973) and Princeton University (1973–1979) and was a Visiting Lecturer at Harvard University (1975–1976). She subsequently served at the University of Pennsylvania as Associate Professor (1979–1985), Professor of Economics (1985–1990) and Director of Graduate Studies (1983–1984), respectively. She has had teaching and research affiliations with Princeton University (Institute for Advanced Study (1983–1983) and Industrial Relations Section (1987–1988)), Brookings Institution (1993–1994), Russell Sage Foundation (1997–1998), or Katherine Hampson Bessell Fellow, Radcliffe IAS (2005–2006). At the National Bureau of Economic Research, she was Director of the Development of the American Economy Program (1989–2017).

Goldin's partner and collaborator is the US economist Lawrence Francis Katz (*1959). He is the Elisabeth Allison Professor of Economics at Harvard University and a research fellow of the National Bureau of Economic Research. He has also served as Chief Economist at the US Department of Labor, *etc.* Katz's research focuses on labour economics and the economics of social problems. He has studied and compared trends in wage inequality in the US, the effects of globalization and technological change on labour markets, the economics of immigration, issues of unemployment or regional labour markets, evaluations of labour market programmes, the problems of low-income neighbourhoods, the social and economic consequences of the birth control pill, and the effects of neighbourhood poverty on low-income families in the context of experiments in housing mobility. Together with Goldin, they have published many scholarly papers and books. For example, they have long been interested in the historical development of career and family decisions and outcomes related to college-educated men and women in the United States.

In 1990, Goldin became the first female professor in the Department of Economics at Harvard University. Goldin is currently the Henry Lee Professor of Economics at Harvard University and holds the Lee and Ezpeleta Professorship of Arts and Sciences (2023–1928). Goldin is also the Co-director of the Gender in the Economy Group at the National Bureau of Economic Research and a Research Associate at IZA – Institute of Labor Economics.

She is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Academy of Political and Social Science, the American Economic Association, the American Philosophical Society, the Cliometric Society, the Economic History Association, the Econometric Society and the Society of Labor Economists. She has contributed editorially to such prestigious journals as the *American Economic Review*, *Journal of Economic History*, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *Review of Economics and Statistics*, and others.

Goldin has received numerous doctorates from Lund University, European University Institute, University of Zurich, University of Rochester, *etc.* She has received major research and teaching awards, including the IZA Prize in Labor Economics (2016) and the BBVA Frontiers in Knowledge Award (2019). Her scholarly publications have also been awarded repeatedly. She will deliver the traditional Nobel Prize Lecture on 8 December 2023 on "An Evolving Economic Force".

Goldin's research and contribution

Goldin specializes in labour economics and economic history. She has published dozens of texts and is the author, co-author and editor of many books. Her expertise covers a range of topics, including women's work, the role of women in economic development, gender differences in earnings, earnings inequality, technological change, education and immigration. Most of Goldin's research interprets the present through the lens of the past and examines the origins and genesis of current issues.

Goldin's initial focus was on the economic history of the American South. Her first book, *Urban Slavery in the American South, 1820 to 1860: A Quantitative History* (1976), was her doctoral dissertation. Among her widely cited articles is *The Economic Cost of the American Civil War: Estimates and Implications* (1975) with F. Lewis. Later, she collaborated with K. Sokoloff on research on early industrialization in the US and the role of women workers, child labour and immigrant and working-class families. The article *Women, Children, and Industrialization in the Early Republic: Evidence from the Manufacturing Censuses* (1982) builds on data from manufacturing firms in 1820–1950 to examine the role of women and children in the industrialization of the American Northeast. It documents the very significant labour participation of women and children. In doing so, Goldin concludes that women workers have been largely overlooked

in economic history, and she begins to study in more detail how the female workforce has changed and its role in processes of economic growth.

Key texts from this research effort include *Monitoring Costs and Professional Segregation by Sex: A Historical Analysis* (1987), *Life Cycle Labor Force Participation of Married Women: Historical Evidence and Implications* (1989), and *The Role of World War II in the Rise of Women's Employment* (1991). The book *Understanding the Gender Gap: An Economic History of American Women* (1990) recapitulates the changes in women's employment in the US from the 18th century to the end of the 20th century, the role of women in economic growth, and the reasons for the existence of gender gaps in earnings and employment and their persistence. She argues that women's increasing participation in the workforce is a slow and historical process independent of a generation's progress.

Goldin became known for her historical studies of women in the US economy. She has explored in depth the history of women's search and decision-making about career, family and marriage, including the impact of contraception or the issue of women's surnames after marriage as a social marker, the reasons for the current high proportion of women in higher education, the new life cycle of women's employment, *etc.* The area of gender differences in pay between men and women and differences in earnings and status after a woman has given birth to a child are often highlighted.

Goldin has collected and systematized data on women's representation in labour markets for over two hundred years, primarily from the US. From this, she deduced how and why the gender pay and employment gap has changed. Women's participation in labour markets has only sometimes been upward-sloping over time. However, it has formed a U-shaped curve, as summarized, for example, in *The U-Shaped Female Labor Force Function in Economic Development and Economic History* (1995). According to Goldin's research, married women's labour force participation rate first declines and then increases as countries develop. This pattern is confirmed by the economic development processes of different countries and the history of developed countries. Married women's employment declined from the early 19th century onwards with the transition from an agrarian to an industrial society. Production shifted from households, family farms and small businesses to the broader market. Goldin documents that, for example, around 1800, women's participation in labour markets was much higher than at the turn of the 19th century. From the early 20th century onwards, married women's employment began to rise again with the growth of the service sector. However, the levels of female employment in the 1790s were reached at the end of the century. Goldin explains this development as the result of structural changes and the development of social norms concerning women's responsibilities and duties in the home and family.

She also points out that women's education levels have steadily increased over the 20th century and are now higher than men's in most high-income countries. Goldin shows that access to the contraceptive pill has played a crucial role in offering women new career-planning options. The universal availability of hormonal contraceptives provided women with the opportunity to postpone the age at which they enter marriage and subsequently become mothers, which revolutionized their lives, not only their professional lives. It gave women time to devote to gaining professional experience and further growth. This is the subject of the text *The Power of the Pill: Oral Contraceptives and Women's Career and Marriage Decisions* (2002).

Goldin noted that despite modernization, economic growth and the rising proportion of women in the workforce in the 20th century, the gender earnings gap has not been closed. Thus, in modern history, income inequality may not only be shrinking. The gender earnings gap in economically developed countries was supposed to have fallen by the Industrial Revolution of 1820–1950. This was followed by 1890–1930 when the demand for white-collar jobs grew due to technological advances in agriculture and industry. In 1930–1980, however, the differences in earnings between men and women did not change either. The cause of this stagnation in the gap has been linked to changes in remuneration. After the Second World War, remuneration in the form of a monthly wage rather than payments based on, for example, items of clothing became predominant. According to Goldin, the shift to a system of monthly payments reduced the influence of the productivity of a particular worker (e.g., a seamstress) on her earnings. The influence of other factors increased, and employers began to favour workers with long and uninterrupted careers in earnings. This is not to women's advantage, given the career breaks due to motherhood and parental responsibilities.

Therefore, economic growth does not always automatically lead to a parity between men's and women's earnings. This is confirmed by the shape of the female labour market participation curve, where economic growth does not necessarily lead to more job opportunities for women. Part of the explanation is that educational decisions affecting lifelong career opportunities are made at a relatively young age. Women's perceptions of their prospects in the workplace and their role in the home, including their willingness to invest in their careers, should be crucial. These are formed at a young age and are slow to change. Young women are largely shaped by the experience of previous generations of mothers, who only returned to work when their offspring had grown up. If this trend continues, the gender pay gap – according to Goldin – is set to narrow only very slowly. Historically, much of the gender income gap can be explained by differences in education and occupational choices. However, Goldin argues that most of these differences in earnings now persist between men and women even in the same occupation and are largely created at the time of the first childbirth. She argues that the pay gap should increase with the passage of a year or two after the birth of the first child. The gender pay gap in economically developed countries is thus

largely explained by career breaks due to childcare. Mothers caring for children are at a disadvantage compared to men in the light of employers' demands for constant availability and time flexibility.

After charting the economic history of women's work, she turned her research to the history of US education. She wrote a series of articles on the high school movement and the shaping of higher education in the USA, culminating in *The Human Capital Century and American Leadership: Virtues of the Past* (2001), which emphasizes the influence of human capital on the wealth of modern nations, with an appreciation of the US educational system and a characterization of its "virtues", which, however, can sometimes change to "vices" due to new political and educational interests.

Together with L. F. Katz, they analysed the history of economic inequality in the USA and its relationship with educational progress. Together, they have published several papers (1995b, 2020, etc.), including *The Race between Education and Technology* (2008), highlighting the role of technological change and the pace of educational progress in influencing the wage structure. They have also collaborated on determining the labour market value of higher education using a field experiment (2016). Goldin has also written on immigration (1994), US unemployment insurance, the role of the press in reducing corruption (2006a), and New Deal policies (1998), among others.

Last but not least, Goldin contributes to gender ideology, describing some of her work as pioneering. Among the best-known is *Orchestrating Impartiality: The Impact of "Blind" Auditions on Female Musicians* (2000), which deals with the audition procedures of symphony orchestras. With the conclusion that "blind" auditions (where musicians play their parts behind a screen) are supposed to increase the proportion of women in orchestras. The texts mentioned above (1995, 2002) and the material *A Grand Gender Convergence: Its Last Chapter* (2014a) are often cited. Goldin counts the convergence of gender roles among the most significant achievements of progress in the economy and society of the 20th century. According to Goldin, neither state intervention nor forcing men to take on more responsibility for running the household is necessary to bring about definitive equality between men and women on labour markets. However, the ultimate solution must involve transforming labour markets, especially regarding changes to the structuring and remuneration of jobs in the direction of greater time flexibility. The gender pay gap would often be significantly reduced and even disappear if firms had no incentive to reward individuals who worked long or certain hours disproportionately. Similar changes are already set to take hold in the high-tech, science and health sectors but have yet to be more evident in the corporate, financial and legal worlds. The book *Career & Family: Women's Century-Long Journey toward Equity* (2021a) recaps the economic history of women, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's careers and gender equality.

Goldin also considers the representation of women in economics to be low and proposes measures to increase their participation. However, it is not only the question of women's representation in economic science subject to different perspectives. It also applies to interpretation of the balance between family and career that many women strive for. Nevertheless, far from all women see the traditional family as a burden and want to "*heroically*" break free from the shackles of male subjugation, as dictated by progressivist religion. Efforts to achieve parity in all areas and at all costs remain highly questionable.

It is often pointed out that women's lower earnings compared to men, even if they are better educated, do not necessarily mean that women are discriminated against. Goldin herself acknowledges the existence of gender differences and relates the observed differences in pay, for example, to different choices made by men and women rather than to oppression and discrimination against women by men. Her research also suggests that many significant changes in women's position on labour markets have occurred naturally, under the pressure of technological change and structural change, including market pressures, without aggressive enforcement of so-called equality and bureaucratic regulation.

Leading book publications:

Urban Slavery in the American South, 1820 to 1860: A Quantitative History (University of Chicago Press, 1976); *Understanding the Gender Gap: An Economic History of American Women* (Oxford University Press, 1990); *Strategic Factors in Nineteenth Century American Economic History: A Volume to Honor Robert W. Fogel* (University of Chicago Press, 1992 – Co-editor H. Rockoff); *The Regulated Economy: A Historical Approach to Political Economy* (University of Chicago Press, 1994 – Co-editor G. D. Libecap); *The Defining Moment: The Great Depression and the American Economy in the Twentieth Century* (University of Chicago Press, 1998 – Co-editors M. D. Bordo, E. N. White); *Corruption and Reform: Lessons from America's History* (University of Chicago Press, 2006a – Co-editor E. L. Glaeser); *The Race Between Education and Technology* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008 – together with L. F. Katz); *Women Working Longer: Increased Employment at Older Ages* (University of Chicago Press, 2018 – Co-editor L. F. Katz); *Career & Family: Women's Century-Long Journey Toward Equity* (Princeton University Press, 2021a); *An Evolving Force: A History of Women in the Economy* (Oxford University Press, 2023).

Key articles and journal contributions:

The Economics of Emancipation (*Journal of Economic History*, 1973, 33 (March)); The Economic Cost of the American Civil War: Estimates and Implications (*Journal of Economic History*, 1975, 35 (June) – Co-author F. Lewis); Female Labor Force Participation: The Origin of Black and White Differences, 1870 to 1880 (*Journal of Economic History*, 1977, 37 (March)); The Work and Wages of Single Women: 1870 to 1920 (*Journal of Economic History*, 1980, 40 (March)); Women, Children, and Industrialization in the Early Republic: Evidence from the Manufacturing Censuses (*Journal of Economic History*, 1982, 42 (December) – Co-author K. Sokoloff); Monitoring Costs and Professional Segregation by Sex: A Historical Analysis (*Journal of Labor Economics*, 1987, 4 (January)); Life Cycle Labor Force Participation of Married Women: Historical Evidence and Implications (*Journal of Labor Economics*, 1989, 7 (January)); The Role of World War II in the Rise of Women's Employment (*American Economic Review*, 1991, 81 (September)); The U-Shaped Female Labor Force Function in Economic Development and Economic History (in Schultz, T. P. (ed.): *Investment in Women's Human Capital and Economic Development*, University of Chicago Press, 1995a); Egalitarianism and the Returns to Education during the Great Transformation of American Education (*Journal of Political Economy*, 1999, 107 (December)); Orchestrating Impartiality: The Impact of "Blind" Auditions on Female Musicians (*American Economic Review*, 2000, 90 (4) – Co-author C. Rouse); The Human Capital Century and American Leadership: Virtues of the Past (*Journal of Economic History*, 2001, 61 (June)); The Power of the Pill: Oral Contraceptives and Women's Career and Marriage Decisions (*Journal of Political Economy*, 2002, 110 (August) – together with L. F. Katz); The „Quiet Revolution“ That Transformed Women's Employment, Education, and Family (*American Economic Review*, 2006b, 96 (May)); A Grand Gender Convergence: Its Last Chapter (*American Economic Review*, 2014a, 104 (April)); A Pollution Theory of Discrimination: Male and Female Differences in Occupations and Earnings (in Boustan, L., Frydman, C., Margo, R. (eds.): *Human Capital and History: The American Record*, University of Chicago Press 2014b); The Value of Postsecondary Credentials in the Labor Market: An Experimental Study (*American Economic Review*, 2016a, 106 (3) – Co-authors D. J. Deming, N. Yuchtman, A. Abulafi, L. F. Katz); The New Lifecycle of Women's Employment: Disappearing Humps, Sagging Middles, Expanding Tops (*Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 2017, 31 (1) – together with J. Mitchell); Watersheds in Child Mortality: The Role of Effective Water and Sewerage Infrastructure, 1880 to 1920 (*Journal of Political Economy*, 2019, 127 (2) – Co-author M. Alsan); Extending the Race between Education and Technology (*American Economic Review*, 2020, 110 (May) – Co-authors D. Autor, L. F. Katz); Journey Across a Century of Women (*Milken Institute Review*, 2021b, 23 (2)).

Additional information:

American Slavery: De Jure and De Facto (Goldin, C., *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 1979, 10 (Summer)); *The Decline of “Non-Competing Groups”: Changes in the Premium to Education* (Goldin, C., Katz, L. F., NBER Working Paper 5202, 1995b (August)); Goldin Demystifies Gender Economics: Professor’s Research Analyzes Causes of the Gender Gap (Alexander, S. M., *The Harvard Crimson*, April 26, 2007); Vztah genderové mezery, konkurenceschopnosti a udržitelnosti ekonomiky – postavení České republiky v mezinárodním srovnání (Křečková Kroupová, Z., Řezanková, H., *Politická ekonomie*, 2016b, 64 (4)); J. V. Robinsonová a R. Luxemburová – největší ženské osobnosti teoretické ekonomie. S předmluvou I. Švihlíkové (Sirůček, P., 2. updated edition, Fórum společenských věd Klubu společenských věd, 2019); *Kapitoly z moderní ekonomie trhů práce* (Brožová, D., C. H. Beck, 2019); Quo vadis, „nobelovské“ ocenění za ekonomické vědy? (Sirůček, P., *Politická ekonomie*, 2021, 69 (4)); Understanding the Economic Impact of COVID-19 on Women (Goldin, C., *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, Spring 2022); <https://scholar.harvard.edu/goldin>.