In Memoriam: Ken Sokoloff

Ken Sokoloff, age 54, Professor of Economics at the University of California, Los Angeles passed away on 21 May 2007 following complications from liver cancer.

Sokoloff was one of the world's leading experts in economic history—the study of the long-term processes that drive economic growth. His research covered many different topics and areas ranging from the U.S. patent system to comparative institutional development in the United States and Latin America. He wrote extensively and published more than 60 academic articles and book chapters.

Sokoloff received his B.A. degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1974. He went on to do graduate research at Harvard as a student of Robert Fogel. He received his Ph.D. in economics in 1982. As a graduate student he participated in a number of projects dealing with the evolution of the American labor force and the important role of women in U.S. industrialization. His dissertation research focused on productivity growth in U.S. manufacturing before the Civil War. His discovery that productivity growth was rapid even prior to mechanization led him to place considerable emphasis on the importance of access to markets in fostering economic growth.

Sokoloff joined the UCLA faculty in 1980. At UCLA he built one of the premier groups in economic history in North America and mentored scores of students, all the while maintaining a research program that led him to co-author papers with scholars from many parts of the country: David Dollar (the World Bank), Stanley Engerman (Rochester) Claudia Goldin (Harvard), Stephen Haber (Stanford), Zorina Khan (Bowdoin), Naomi Lamoreaux (UCLA), Eric Zolt (UCLA), and many others. He emphasized the interdisciplinary nature of economic history and championed a very open approach to research. This strategy combined with his dedication to maintaining a convivial atmosphere around him, attracted scholars not just in economics and history but also law, political science, and sociology. His desire to help others' research made the Von Gremp workshop a core element in the training of graduate students at UCLA and a very desirable setting for scholars to receive feedback on their research. In 2006 the university recognized his success in program building by formally creating the UCLA Center for Economic History.

In addition to his appointment at UCLA, Sokoloff held visiting appointments at prestigious institutions in the United States and abroad including Oxford University, the Ecole des Hautes Etudes, the California Institute of Technology, Tel Aviv University, the Russell Sage Foundation, and the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford. His accomplishments were recognized by his being named a Research Associate of the National Bureau of Economic Research and a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Among his peers, the excellence of his research also made him one of the rare two-time winners of the Arthur H. Cole prize for best article in this JOURNAL.

From his dissertation work he carried an interest in the relationships among factor endowments, access to markets, human capital, technological change, and more generally economic growth. In his early years at UCLA he continued working on American manufacturing, paying increasing attention to the factors that explained the Northeast's persistent leadership. He also sought confirmation for his emphasis on the

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This remembrance of Ken Sokoloff's contributions to economic history was put together for the Economic History Association by a number of his friends, colleagues, and students, including Jean-Laurent Rosenthal, Steve Haber, Naomi Lamoreaux, Dora Costa, Latika Chaudhary, Petra Moser, and Eric Zolt.

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importance of access to the market and competition in contemporary data, investigating the industrial development of follower economies such as South Korea, Taiwan, and Mexico. This research furthered his argument and led him to consider the extent to which American institutions were particularly favorable to growth.

He pursued this objective by focusing on the role of endowments and on institutions that favored technical change. In several papers on the role of seasonality, Sokoloff emphasized that regions where agriculture was heavily focused on small grains (wheat and rye) could not develop large permanent industrial labor forces because of the need to respond to the sharp peaks in agricultural labor demand at harvest time. Interestingly, Sokoloff's regions could include either part of the United States or whole countries, such as the United Kingdom. In such regions rural manufacturing would endure in many labor-intensive industries. Moreover seasonal labor stoppages reduced the willingness of entrepreneurs to deploy capital and in particular to mechanize production. In contrast, in the U.S. Northeast, agriculture's focus on livestock made it relatively easy to create a large full-time labor force and thus to increase the rewards to inventive activities that were embodied in machinery.

Among the institutions that Sokoloff placed at the heart of the American experience was the patent system. Starting in the late 1980s he began a long-term project to trace out the impact of the patent system on American economic growth. He did so by accumulating large samples of patent records so as to be able to study the extent to which patenting was individually, geographically, or socially specialized. One of the principal findings of this work was the amazing degree to which common people in the nineteenth-century United States were active inventors and patent holders. Nevertheless, he also noticed that over the nineteenth century repeat patentees became more important and that in response a market for technology emerged in the United States. For Sokoloff, a democratic process of invention blossomed in the United States because of the joint evolution of the patent system and the market for technology. That process was also favored by a relatively equal distribution of income and high rates of literacy. Sokoloff noted that other patent systems (e.g., British or French) were quite different in that they were either highly restrictive or failed to examine proposed inventions for novelty and usefulness. While European countries did industrialize, he argued that they would have done much better if they had adopted an intellectual property rights regime closer to that of the United States. Such reforms did occur in a number of countries later in the nineteenth century.

Starting in the mid 1990s, Sokoloff increasingly focused on the comparative economic history of Latin America and the United States. He noted that the areas that had been the most successful in the early years of colonization and settlement (the Caribbean, certain parts of Central America, and the U.S. South) had fallen far behind what had been at the time marginal areas such as the northern United States or Canada. In a series of highly influential articles he showed how geographic factors such as climate and soils played a fundamental role in the development of economic and political institutions in these societies, and how the influence of these initial economic and political institutions has persisted to the present day. In particular Sokoloff documented both within the United States and across the Americas that early institutions had a large effects on the evolution of human capital (for example, as measured by literacy rates) and on the distribution of economic wealth and political rights. The adverse effects of high degrees of initial inequality could only be offset by large shocks to the demand for labor. Indeed, elites were willing to liberalize only when the returns to attracting immigrants were particularly high. These articles are standard reading in

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graduate curricula in economic history, development economics, and political science. Indeed, the ramifications of this work extend well beyond academia, and have shaped the way that economists at multilateral aid organizations, such as the World Bank, think about reforming economic institutions that retard growth.

Beyond UCLA, Sokoloff brought his interdisciplinary values to the All-UC group in Economic History. His service to that institution included being a member of the steering committee off and on for nearly three decades as well organizing more than a half dozen conferences. He has been a trustee of the Economic History Association and the Cliometrics Society, a member of the editorial board of this JOURNAL and an associate editor of the *Journal of Economic Perspectives*.

He is survived by his father, Dr. Louis Sokoloff, and his sister, Ann, and many colleagues, friends, and former students. Donations in his memory may be made to the Kenneth L. Sokoloff Memorial Fund at the Economic History Association, Department of Economics, 500 El Camino Real, Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, CA 95053-0385. Checks should be made payable to the Economic History Association, with a notation that they are for the Sokoloff endowment, the income from which will be used to provide Sokoloff fellowships for the support of young scholars.

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