

## Remembering Richard Sutch

Richard Sutch passed away on September 19, 2019, at his home in Kensington, California. His death marked the end of a distinguished career as a Professor of Economics and History at the University of California Berkeley and at Riverside. On December 8, 2019, a group of relatives, colleagues, and friends gathered for a celebration of his 77<sup>th</sup> birthday in Berkeley, California. This essay is an elaboration of my remarks at that ceremony.

My association with Richard dates from the fall of 1967, when I was a visiting professor at UC Berkeley for the year, and Richard joined the Berkeley faculty at the beginning of the winter quarter, 1968. That spring we agreed to offer a graduate course dealing with American economic history. One of the topics covered in the course was the economics of American slavery, a subject that had become a major focus of research carried out by practitioners of the “new economic history” of the 1960s. Sandor Fuchs, one of the students in the class, wrote an excellent paper dealing with problems facing African-American farmers in the South after the Civil War. Richard and I, who were both students of Douglass North at the University of Washington and were familiar with the slavery debate, were intrigued by Sandor’s analysis.

Richard had participated in a panel discussion on slavery that was published in the *Journal of Economic History*, and he was particularly eager to pursue the subject. (Sutch 1967) Fuchs had noted in his paper that although the censuses of the United States for 1860, 1870, and 1880 had collected data on the race of people in the South, the published tables dealing with agricultural activities did not identify the race of farm operators. Consequently, it was difficult to carry out any detailed analysis comparing the economic situation of farms operated by freed blacks and those operated by white farmers. Richard noted that this problem could be corrected if one had access to the manuscript forms turned in by the marshals who collected the data. He pointed out that two economic historians – William Parker and Robert Gallman – had constructed a sample of farms using the manuscript census forms of 1860 which allowed them to examine the distribution of wealth in the South for that year.<sup>1</sup> “Rog,” he explained to me, “Why couldn’t we use the manuscript census returns to identify the race of farm operators after the war? We know that the

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<sup>1</sup> The Parker-Gallman sample included 5,229 farms drawn from all farms in counties producing at least 1,000 bales of cotton in 1859. (Parker and Gallman 1960)

census entered information on race and other demographic data for everyone in the population schedules, along with the name (but not the race) of farmers and farm production on the agricultural schedules. All we have to do is get ahold of the manuscript census returns collected by the marshals, randomly choose several thousand southern farms in the agricultural returns and locate each farmer in the population returns, and record the data.”

“Right,” I said, “that’s all we need to do.”

I assumed that would be the end of the conversation. However, Richard mistook my sarcasm for unbridled enthusiasm. Parker and Gallman had obtained the 1860 census manuscripts; why couldn’t we do the same for 1880?<sup>2</sup> “Well for one thing,” I pointed out, “this would be an expensive enterprise and we don’t have any money.” Richard was never one to be discouraged by the absence of research funds. He assured me that the National Science Foundation – which had funded the Parker-Gallman project – would be eager to support two young scholars who wanted to explore the economics of emancipation after the Civil War.

Much to my surprise, Richard was right. With some help from Professor Joe Garbarino, who was the director of the Institute of Business and Economic Research at UC Berkeley, NSF agreed to fund our proposal to collect a sample of southern farms in 1880. At this point I stopped worrying about the potential obstacles to our proposed research project and jumped on Richard’s train of thought as it sped along the intellectual rails of economic history. By the fall of 1968 the academic partnership of *Ransom and Sutch* was ready for business.

Our first order of business was to establish the *Southern Economic History Project* at the University of California, Berkeley. In July of 1969 we issued our first *Working Paper*, titled “The Rise of Sharecropping in the American South – 1865-1900: A Preliminary Report.” “The purpose of this paper,” we claimed “has been rather modest.” The objective of the *SEHP*, however, was a very ambitious program of research to examine and explain the impact of emancipation in the postbellum South. I doubt that even Richard, with his unlimited enthusiasm, imagined what was in store for us as we set out to rewrite Southern history.

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<sup>2</sup> The decision to use the 1880 Census manuscripts rather than the 1870 Census was made because of some serious deficiencies in the 1870 data collection. See the discussion in *Ransom and Sutch 1977*, Appendix G, 283-4.

Obtaining microfilms of the census manuscripts turned out to be the least of our problems. Identifying the demographic data for our sample of farm operators in the cotton-growing regions of the South in 1880 was a more formidable task. The names on the population schedules were not alphabetized and in 1968 there was no index of names in the population schedules. The only way to find someone involved manually scanning the handwritten returns in the microfilms. For this task the *SEHP* hired a small but dedicated group of assistants to cull through the microfilms. We eventually collected data for 11,021 farms located in 73 sample counties throughout the South.<sup>3</sup>

All of this was before the advent of portable computers with hard drives capable of storing many megabytes of information. Our data for each farm had to be stored on 80 column punch cards. We developed a system of codes so that the data for each farm could be entered on one card. “Computer time” was expensive and there was always a queue of people wanting to use the giant computers. Not surprisingly, assistant professors were at the end of the line. Richard, who was in charge of our computer operations, would drop off boxes of our punch cards in the evening and wait for morning to get the results in the basement of Evans Hall. One misplaced comma or bent card could mean that you had to start over. Needless to say, a successful computer run was always an exciting event. If I happened to be visiting Berkeley, it was worth a late-night celebration.

In the decade following its creation the *SEHP* managed to produce fifteen Working Papers, eight published articles, and numerous presentations dealing with the economic history of the postbellum South. In August of 1977, Richard and I, along with our wives, Susie and Connie, traveled to the Economic History Association meetings in New Orleans to receive the very first copies of the book that pulled all of this research together into a cliometric history of the postbellum South: *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation*.

The research collaboration that culminated with the publication of *One Kind of Freedom* was not something that either Richard or I anticipated when we agreed to jointly teach a course on American economic history in 1968. My research up to that point had focused on the role of government investing in canals to spur the economic growth of the United States economy in the

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<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed description of the compilation process, see Ransom and Sutch 1977, Appendix G.

antebellum years. (Ransom 1964, 1967, 1970, 1971) Richard had shown an interest in the economics of slavery in his undergraduate studies with Douglass North at the University of Washington, and he sat in on Alexander Gerschenkron's seminar on economic history at Harvard. However, Richard's main research as a graduate student at MIT was his work with Franco Modigliani on monetary theory.<sup>4</sup> Sandor Fuch's paper ignited a spark of interest in both of us that evolved into an academic partnership and friendship that would last for fifty years.

My memories of Richard over this period go beyond the academic adventures of writing articles for academic journals and a book. On the acknowledgement page of *One Kind of Freedom* we wrote: "This book is dedicated to our families, who shared our year in Berkeley when work on this volume was begun." In the spring of 1972, I had received a phone call from Richard telling me that his colleague Albert Fishlow was going on leave, and the Berkeley Economics Department was prepared to offer me a visiting appointment to take his place. Richard added that if we came to Berkeley, the Ransoms and the Sutches could rent Albert's three story house on LeRoy Avenue – just a few blocks north of the campus. It was an intriguing idea, so Connie and I made a trip north to meet with Albert, Richard and Susie to look at the house. We quickly reached an agreement to rent the house. We called it the *Berkeley Commune* – it was comprised of four adults, two Ransom children aged 7 and 10; two dogs belonging to the Ransoms; two cats belonging to the Ransoms; two cats belonging to the Sutches and a 20-pound cat belonging to the Fishlows. The top floor, which had three bedrooms and a bath, was more than enough for the Ransom contingent and there was a master bedroom suite over the garage for Richard and Susie together with an office for Susie to help her pursue a PhD in Comparative Literature. The main floor had a kitchen, dining room, and living room for all of us to use. The basement had a large playroom and a laundry which were converted for our purposes into an office for Richard and me and a space for Connie to pursue her talents as a potter.

Living in the *Berkeley Commune* was a well-organized adventure. Richard and Connie did the shopping and cooking; Susie and I were the cleanup crew. Richard loved to cook, and he was a marvelous and ingenuous chef. The menus for dinner, which were drawn up at the beginning of

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<sup>4</sup> In 1966 Richard coauthored an article in the *American Economic Review* dealing with monetary policy. (Modigliani and Sutch 1966) When he arrived in Berkeley in 1967 the faculty assumed that Richard's primary research and teaching responsibility would be in macro and monetary economics.

each week, would do justice to an upscale restaurant. Some notebook pages that have survived to the present included logs of the dinner menus kept by Connie. An entry for Sunday, November 5<sup>th</sup> reads:

Veal with Paprikash, homemade noodles, green beans with sour cream topping.  
Wine was always on the menu – usually from ½ gallon jugs.  
We only had dessert on Sunday.

One might think that a steady diet of such culinary delights might cause us to gain weight, but Richard assured us that this was not the case. His dictum was “It’s not *what* you eat; it is *how much* you eat.”<sup>5</sup>

The house had a large roll top desk in the basement which served as the writing center for Richard and me. We worked out a system where I would sit at the desk with my Smith Corona electric typewriter, and Richard would dictate text for whatever draft we were working on. Either one of us would suggest changes and/or corrections as we went along. The basement was not the warmest room in the house, and Richard, who was not fond of wearing shoes, would stand on a chair in his stocking feet with an afghan draped over his shoulders to keep warm. We would type and retype the draft we were working on and then engage in a “cut and paste” session that could go on for some time. The advent of home computers eventually made our system much more efficient, and our spelling and typing errors were greatly reduced. But the sense of involvement from both of us remained.

The legacy of those months of living together in the Fishlow house is a sense of camaraderie among all the members of our families that lasted up to the present. Richard was “family.” Our academic partnership prospered because, for us, writing was not just work; it was fun. Years ago, when my younger daughter Leslie was about five years old, Richard and I were working on some project at home in my office. Connie had to go out to the store, and before she left, she stuck her head in the door to my office and said “Would you to keep an eye on Leslie?” When she got back, Leslie met her at the door. “Are daddy and Richard still working?” Connie asked. “No mommy, they are just talking,” Leslie replied. Leslie had it right; one of the things Richard and I did best was “just talk.” Our presentations at conferences – while deadly serious –

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<sup>5</sup> I owe a debt of gratitude to Connie for helping to supply the details for our life at the *Berkeley Commune*.

were always fun for us. Our PowerPoint presentations were legendary; we once prepared 72 slides for a 20-minute presentation. Small wonder that a colleague introduced us as the “Dynamic Duo.”

One of the most significant academic events of my visit to Berkeley in 1972 was the creation of the *All UC Group in Economic History*. Richard and I, together with Albert Fishlow and Harry Scheiber – who had a position in the Hastings School of Law – presented the UC President’s office with a proposal to host a conference that would invite papers by UC faculty and graduate students who were working on research projects and economic history. Our efforts were successful beyond our fondest dreams. We received a small grant and were able to invite a group of scholars from several UC campuses to a conference that was held in the spring of 1972. The idea caught on, and in 1979 the All UC Group held another conference at UC Davis. Since then, under the leadership of Richard and Alan Olmstead, and Greg Clark, the All UC Group has been able to organize an extensive series of research initiatives, conferences, seminars, and graduate student retreats that have made the University of California the world’s leading center for the study of economic history. Beginning with a visit to Estonia and Moscow in 1986, the All UC Group organized conferences and visits with Russian scholars in Saint Petersburg and in Moscow.<sup>6</sup> My international travels with Richard also included several visits to France where Richard could explore the culinary delights of Paris. On one occasion we took a daylong trip to Dijon on the TGV train for a meal at a five star restaurant.

*One Kind of Freedom* touched off a vigorous discussion dealing with the question of debt peonage and the economic stagnation in the South.<sup>7</sup> While we were wrestling with critics dealing with our explanation of the impact of emancipation, Richard and I gradually shifted our joint research efforts to issues of saving, retirement, and economic security in the United States after the Civil War. We established a project to study the history of saving (Ransom and Sutch 1986), and another to examine data collected by state bureaus of labor between 1874 and the first world war. (Carter, Ransom, and Sutch 1991) These projects produced six published articles together

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<sup>6</sup> For more on the accomplishments of the All UC Group in Economic History, see their website at <https://allucgroup.ucdavis.edu/>.

<sup>7</sup> See the list of articles by Ransom and Sutch dealing with emancipation and slavery listed in the appendix. NSF held a conference at Duke University in 1978. A collection of essays commenting on the book are in the volume edited by Walton and Shepherd (1981).

with numerous papers presented at conferences. The last paper that I coauthored with Richard was a paper that argued a major factor in bringing about the war was a growing divergence in the political and economic environment of the Northern and Southern states brought about by the process of modernization in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. (Ransom and Sutch 2001)

During the academic year 1984-85 I moved from the Economics Department to the History Department at UCR. The change in disciplinary affiliation involved much more than simply moving to a new office. I was now living in the world of historians, and I became increasingly involved in studying war and economics. Upon arriving in the history department, I was faced with the prospect of teaching a course on the history of the American Civil War. I decided that I needed to write a book that would explain slavery and the Civil War to historians, a task that Richard thought would be futile. The result of my efforts was *Conflict and Compromise: The Political Economy of Slavery, Emancipation, and the American Civil War*, a book that used the analysis of Ransom and Sutch in an effort to “make sense of the economic and political factors that produced the conflict we call the Civil War.” (Ransom 1989, xiv) As usual, Richard was right; for economists to try and make sense out of wars is a futile endeavor. But historians liked *Conflict and Compromise*, so I kept on writing about wars, and eventually I became embroiled with the economic causes and consequences of the first world war, so I wrote another book, *Gambling on War: Confidence, Fear, and the Tragedy of the First World War*. (Ransom 2018) Richard followed my effort to examine the economics of wars with some interest, occasionally providing comments and insights that improved the arguments. When I sent him a final draft of the manuscript for *Gambling on War*, he emailed me saying that “as you might expect, I found Chapter 5 to be the most interesting.” (Chapter 5 examines the economics of the war.) Richard did not completely ignore the first world war in his own writings. In 2015/16 he wrote two essays dealing with the development of Liberty Bonds as a way for the United States to meet the challenge facing the United States when they entered the war in 1917. (Sutch 2015, 2016)

Though our research interests diverged, our friendship never wavered. In 1997 Richard married Susan Carter, professor of Economics at UCR, and the following year they moved to Riverside. Susan, Richard, and I continued to work on the Savings Project, and in 2004 the three of us coauthored a paper on the impact of the Life-Cycle Transition and the Antebellum American Fertility Decline. (Carter, Ransom, and Sutch 2004)

Over the years, Richard managed to provide innumerable suggestions that caused me to make adjustments to my lifestyle. One evening in Riverside he called me to say that he wanted me to come over and look at something. I explained that I couldn't do that right then because I was about to watch a really good basketball game. "Who won?" he asked. "I don't know who won; the game isn't over yet," I replied. "Then how do you know if it is a good game?" he asked. At the time I thought this was just another "Richardism" to file away with my other experiences with Richard's sometimes curious logic on the way the world works. But over time I came to realize that once again he was right. I used to get very upset watching my team lose. The magic of 21<sup>st</sup> century television allows me to record games and now only watch them after I have checked with ESPN to see who won. Thanks to Richard, I am a much calmer sports fan.

Shortly before he passed away Connie and I visited Richard in Berkeley. When it came time to say goodbye we knew that this was almost surely the last time we would see each other. Both of us were at a loss for words, so we just shook hands and smiled. When I got home I was sorry that I hadn't been able to come up with something appropriate to say. So I sent Richard a card with the following message:

*Richard,*

*This is just a thank you note for all the years we spent working, playing and enjoying each other.*

*I wanted to say something appropriate when we parted yesterday afternoon but I couldn't find the words.*

*So here is a belated toast to all that we accomplished: our book, our working papers, our articles, our PowerPoint shows ...*

*And, most of all, A toast to the moments we spent together with our families*

*We had our own very special kind of freedom*

Susan Carter assured me that when Richard got the card he smiled. And that is how I will always remember him.

With a smile.

**Selected Publications Coauthored by Ransom and Sutch:****Books:**

*One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977: xx, 409. Second Edition, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

*Explorations in the New Economic History: Essays in Honor of Douglass C. North*, edited with Gary M. Walton. New York: Academic Press, 1982: xvi, 308.

**Articles dealing with Slavery and the Civil War:**

“Debt Peonage in the Cotton South After the Civil War.” *Journal of Economic History* 32 (September 1972): 641-669.

“The Impact of the Civil War and of Emancipation on Southern Agriculture.” *Explorations in Economic History* 12 (January 1975): 1-28.

“The 'Lock-in' Mechanism and Overproduction of Cotton in the Post-Bellum South.” *Agricultural History* 49 (April 1975): 405-425.

“Sharecropping: Market Response or Mechanism of Race Control?” In David Sansing, editor, *What Was Freedom's Price?* Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1978: 51-69

“Growth and Welfare in the American South of the Nineteenth Century.” *Explorations in Economic History* 16 (April 1979): 207-236.

“Capitalists Without Capital: The Burden of Slavery and the Impact of Emancipation.” *Agricultural History* (Fall 1988): 133-160.

“Who Pays for Emancipation? The Burden of Slavery Revisited.” In Richard F. America, editor. *Race, Restitution, and Redistribution: The Present Value and Distribution of the Benefits of Slavery and Discrimination.* London: Greenwood Press, 1990: 31-54

“*One Kind of Freedom*: Reconsidered (and Turbo Charged).” *Explorations in Economic History* 38 (January 2001): 6-40.

“Conflicting Visions: The American Civil War as a Revolutionary Event.” *Research in Economic History* 30 (2001): 249-301.

**Articles dealing with Life Cycle Saving and Retirement:**

“The Labor of Older Americans: Retirement of Men On and Off the Job, 1870-1937.” *Journal of Economic History* 46 (March 1986): 1-30.

“The Life-Cycle Transition: A Preliminary Report on Wealth Holding in America.” In *Income and Wealth Distribution in Historical Perspective.* Utrecht: University of Utrecht, 1986.

“The Tontine Revolution and the Armstrong Investigation: A Case of Stifled Innovation in the American Insurance Industry, 1868-1906.” *Journal of Economic History* (June 1987): 379-390.

“The Decline of Retirement in the Years Before Social Security: U.S. Retirement Patterns, 1870-1940.” In Edward Lazear and Rita Rocardo-Campbell, editors. *Issues in Contemporary Retirement.* Stanford: Hoover Institute Press, 1988: 3-37.

- “Retirement: Past and Present,” with Samuel H. Williamson. Chapter 1 in Alicia H. Munnell, editor. *Retirement and Public Policy: Proceedings of the Second Conference of the National Academy of Social Insurance*. Dubuque: Kendall Hunt Publishing, 1991: 23-57.
- “Inventing Pensions: The Origins of the Company-Provided Pension in the United States, 1900-1940,” with Samuel H. Williamson. In K. Warner Schaie and W. Andrew Achenbaum. *Societal Impact on Aging: Historical Perspectives*. New York: Springer Publishing Co, 1993: 1-44.
- “Family Matters: The Life-Cycle Transition and the Antebellum American Fertility Decline,” with Susan B. Carter. In Timothy Guinnane, William Sundstrum and Warren Whatley, *History Matters: Essays on Economic Growth, Technology, and Demographic Change*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004: 271-327.

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