

## Remembrance of Cynthia Taft Morris

Creative scholar and passionate teacher, Cynthia Taft Morris, died on July 16 at the age of 85. Here are some highlights of her career and remembrances of her as a person of amazing force of character.

After graduating from Vassar College in 1949, Cynthia earned a master degree at the London School of Economics. She worked for the Marshall Plan in Paris, where she collected wage data from the capitals of Western Europe. The question she researched was “did the Marshall Plan raise the standard of living of the workers?” Her Yale Ph.D. in 1959 was directed by labor economist Lloyd Reynolds.

Development Economist. She worked at the World Bank when Hollis Chenery was setting up their research department. With Irma Adelman she broke ground with innovative quantitative analysis of the determinants of economic development. Together they published two books: *Society, Politics, and Economic Development* (1967) and *Economic Growth and Social Equity in Developing Countries* (1973). They believed that economic performance could not be explained without analysing political and social forces. To explain poverty and inequality, it was necessary to study institutions that structured the distribution of income and wealth.

Economic Historian. Next Cynthia and Irma applied their quantitative technique to the economic history of the world for a third book: *Comparative Patterns of Economic Development, 1850-1914* (1988). The research for all their books was financed by four grants from the National Science Foundation. Cynthia created the Washington Area Economic History Seminar and invited renowned scholars in the field to interact with local professors and students. In 1994, she was elected president of the Economic History Association. For her presidential address, she asked “What kind of capitalist institutions favor a widespread distribution of the benefits of capitalism?” During the talk in the room next door, a polka band with tuba and loud singing and dancing made so much noise that Cynthia repeatedly had to increase her own volume. She gave her conclusion by singing it in competition with the tuba. She received a standing ovation. [LINK: for an account of her presidential address]. While teaching at Smith College, her colleague Susan Carter remembers riding into Harvard with Cynthia on Friday afternoons to attend economic history seminars there. Susan drove as Cynthia read aloud the paper assigned for the seminar. They would continue to dissect the presentation and discussion on the way home. Susan recalls those days as among the most stimulating and enjoyable afternoons of her Smith tenure.

Passionate Teacher. Cynthia taught at American University for 18 years. She taught American Economic History and supervised a large number of dissertations, including my own. She demanded hard work and set high standards. In her classes, she required her students each week to create causal diagrams on issues of their own choosing. She was always searching for causal relations. As her research assistant, I helped her organize country data, in order to rank them on such variables as “agreeableness of agricultural institutions” to agricultural development. She believed that agricultural development promoted a wide distribution of the benefits of growth. As my dissertation advisor, she helped me construct my own measures of the agricultural institutions to apply to the family farms system of the Old Northwest in the 1850s. In mid-career, she was recruited as one of the few female senior economists in the country for a chair at Smith College, where she taught for 15 years.

Cynthia retired at age 70 and returned to American University as Distinguished Economist in Residence. She inspired and entranced her colleagues. In her interview by the

Econometrics Society, you will hear her passionate voice and her critical intellect. [\[LINK\]](#) She will be greatly missed and long remembered.

Sue Headlee  
Associate Professor Emerita of Economics  
American University  
August 12, 2013