

Nathan Rosenberg
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Nathan Rosenberg, Fairleigh S. Dickinson Professor of Public Policy Emeritus in the Department of Economics at Stanford University, died Monday, August 24, in Palo Alto, California, at the age of 87. Professor Rosenberg had suffered from memory loss for the past several years and was recently under hospice care.

Nate Rosenberg was most famous for his creative and original work on the economic history of technology. Although he was part of the insurgency that became known as ‘cliometrics’ at Purdue University in the 1960s, Rosenberg never shared that movement’s enthusiasm for historical quantification. He enjoyed recounting the story of his paper on the American machine tools industry, which was invited by and presented to the Conference on Income and Wealth, but was dropped from the conference volume because it had no numbers! Published in the *Journal of Economic History* in 1963, the paper (according to historian David Hounshell) ‘remains to this day perhaps the single most influential essay ever written’ in the history of technology. The article stressed the commonality of technical processes across conventionally defined industries and the role of machine tools as a vehicle for technology diffusion.

After earning a BA at Rutgers University and studying as a Fulbright Scholar at Oxford during 1952–1954, Rosenberg received his PhD in Economics from the University of Wisconsin in 1955. He then taught at the Universities of Pennsylvania, Purdue and Wisconsin. He came to Stanford in 1974, where he taught until his retirement in 2002. Perhaps his most distinctive trait was that unlike other economists, Rosenberg was never afraid to go *Inside the Black Box* (the memorable title of one of his most successful books) to investigate the sources of technological progress. Although in many ways the founder of ‘endogenous technological change’, Rosenberg, went deeper than most economists are willing to, emphasising the reciprocal relationships between technology and science itself. When the Society of the History of Technology awarded Rosenberg the Leonardo da Vinci Medal in 1996, the citation described him as having ‘almost single-handedly changed the way economists and economic historians think about technology and the nature of technological change’. Perhaps so, but today’s growth theorists and cliometricians would be well advised to read him in the original.

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