

In Memoriam  
Robert Evans Jr. (1932-2023)

Robert Evans Jr., Professor Emeritus of Economics, passed away on July 11, 2023 at the age of 91. Bob was born in Sterling, Colorado and earned his undergraduate degree at MIT in 1954 and his PhD in Economics at the University of Chicago in 1959. He began his career teaching at MIT and joined Brandeis in 1961. He retired after a distinguished 38-year career in 1999.

The *Boston Globe* obituary had it exactly right: “Bob was a man of great heart, integrity, sincerity, compassion and kindness. He had a curious mind, a wide-ranging knowledge and an incredible memory.” Professor Emeritus Tren Dolbear kindly contributed to these recollections, and he reminded me how hard it is to think of Bob without a bright smile on his face and a full readiness to engage and help, whatever the question or issue.

Bob was a member of a formidable generation of American Asia scholars who became interested in that part of the world through World War II or, as in Bob’s case, the Korean war. He served in Korea as an Army lieutenant for two years between his undergraduate and graduate degrees. He specialized in labor economics and eventually in Japan’s curious labor markets, which included lifetime employment in larger companies. His work later expanded to other forms of bondage—American slavery, the military draft, and prison systems. Bob’s two major books were *Public Policy Toward Labor* (1965) and *The Labor Economies of Japan and the United States* (1971). At Brandeis, he taught a variety of courses on labor markets, Japan, American Economic History, and Law and Economics. But his interests were hardly confined to these fields—his passion for transportation took him from traveling the trans-Siberian railroad with his family to articles in top journals on the economics of clipper ships.

And Bob excelled not only in academics but also in community life—in decades of service to Brandeis, to the town of Acton, to his church, and especially to his family. At Brandeis he was Chair of the Economics Department for several terms, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and Chair of the Faculty Senate. In his home town of Acton, he held a wide range of leadership positions, including on the Acton-Boxborough School Committee, in the Acton Congregational Church, and in various local charitable institutions. A footnote on Bob’s tenure as Dean of the College: he apparently pioneered the Brandeis tradition of summer readings recommendations by curating a “great books” list from the Departments and distributing it to students at a loss on how to spend their free time.

Meanwhile, Bob and his first wife Lois raised a family that is the stuff of legends. Eventually seven kids arrived, whom they ferried on sabbaticals to Japan, Russia and China. For several years on these trips they schooled them at home. The strategy seems to have worked—all seven children went on to graduate from Harvard College.

Lois passed away nearly two decades ago, but Bob leaves behind his second wife, Marian, ten children and stepchildren, and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Not to mention countless colleagues and students who benefited from his many wise and productive years with us.