

IN MEMORIAM

Carl Brown (1928–2020)

The world of Middle Eastern scholars lost one of its senior members in April 2020 when L. Carl Brown passed away. And the American community of Middle Eastern Studies lost one of its founders. A professor at Princeton University from 1966 until his retirement in 1993, and an active presence there and in our field after his retirement, Brown fostered the careers of many of us.

I owe an immeasurable personal debt to him. I first entered Brown's office in the fall of 1980 as I began my doctoral program in the Department of Politics at Princeton University. I knew at the time that I had some interest in the Middle East and I was directed to his office. As the director of the Near Eastern Studies Program, he acted as gatekeeper for students in various departments of the university who wished to add a field in regional studies. He was, of course, warm and welcoming, using a phrase that I had not yet learned in my introductory Arabic class: "Ahlan wa-sahlan." I was also (as I discovered he said when his written evaluation was sent to me by mistake) "painfully shy," so I likely made no reply. But I came to discover that Brown was simply one of the most supportive teachers I would ever have. I took three seminars with him, precepted for his course on the Arab–Israeli conflict, and was even briefly mistaken for his son when I went to Cairo (with his encouragement and support, of course) to study Arabic in 1983. While I spring from an entirely different line of Browns, I feel (or strive to be) very much his spiritual offspring any time I sit with a student who seems ill at ease, intimidated, or even slightly bashful. I said I owe him an immeasurable debt, but I make efforts to repay that debt by emulating his welcoming tone with my own students.

I know I am not alone in benefitting from his guidance and support. But I continue to encounter his influences in other, more intellectual, ways as well – actually, in ways that would have surprised me as a doctoral student. He used the term "modernization" at a time when I was being trained against modernization theory. Brown's scholarship focused on several different

areas: diplomatic history, religious and political thought, state building, and constitutionalism. Even when I was studying with him, some of those concerns seemed old-fashioned. Three decades after I precepted for Brown's course, my own son took the exact same course (not even the course number had changed), taught by a younger (and superb) historian who assembled a syllabus that brought to bear the latest and most imaginative scholarship available – and thus had no overlap with the course as Brown had taught it.

But there is a remarkable and extremely enduring set of qualities to his scholarship that I have come to appreciate more with each passing year; Brown's scholarly contribution is very much alive. His work had timeless virtues. He stressed the development of language abilities, meticulous research, and other skills harnessed to broad intellectual questions. He wrote with admirable clarity – and with a bit of wit and style. Brown's scholarly virtues continue to serve as a standing model.

But I should go further: it is not only how he conducted scholarship, but the scholarship that he produced that has been of far more long-lasting value than I initially realized. Brown's work is anything but outdated. Indeed, I keep on bumping into it. Two of his broad, synthetic works – on religion and state and on international politics in the Middle East – can be read today for their profound insights. And his more specialized scholarship, on nineteenth-century Tunisia, covered themes that not only continue to drive scholarship but also to animate current political struggles. When I began working on constitutionalism, I found myself reading his work. When I delved into modern Islamic political thought, I ran into his analysis and an important translation he had published. When I think about state formation in the Middle East, I go back to some of his careful archival work on Tunisia immediately.

So Brown's work is still very much worth reading today. His passing will rob junior scholars of his mentorship, but those of us who benefited directly from his guidance and example are still able to draw from, and pass along, all that he taught us, not only as a scholar, but as a human being. ✂

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