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OBITUARY

WILLIAM O. BROWN

WE have to record with great regret the death on 1 February 1969 of Professor William O. Brown who had served as a member of the Executive Council of the Institute since 1954. His friendship and unflinching helpfulness will be sadly missed by many members of the Institute in all parts of the world. We have expressed our sincere sympathy to his family and his colleagues in Boston.

Professor Brown's interest in Africa developed in the late twenties, when, as a graduate student in sociology at Chicago, he was preparing a doctoral thesis on 'Race prejudice: a social study'. For this he turned to the literature on the Caribbean and South Africa for comparative data as part of his inquiry into the position of the Negro in the United States. In 1933 he used a period of leave from the University of Cincinnati to visit South Africa at his own expense and subsequently wrote a number of articles on race relations in South Africa and comparisons with the patterns of social relations and attitudes in the United States.

But his concern with race relations had begun much earlier during his boyhood and early student days. Born in October 1899 in Fayette County, Texas, he grew up as one of a Methodist family of English stock in a rural community where Negro share croppers formed a considerable proportion of the population. As a student at the University of Texas and the Southern Methodist Seminary he became keenly critical of the social barriers, stereotyped attitudes, and conservative doctrines which impeded the economic and educational advance of Negroes. His interests became focused on educational means for modifying these. During the thirties he taught sociology at Cincinnati University and elsewhere before taking up a post at Howard University where from 1936 to 1943 he was able to contribute directly to the task of Negro higher education. His African interests and experience then led to his entering Government service during the war (1943) as a research analyst on Africa in several branches of the Department of State. In 1947 he was appointed Chief of the African Branch in the Office of Intelligence and Research, a post which he held until he left for Boston in 1953. Over these years he was able not only greatly to extend

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his knowledge of African affairs but also to establish personal contact with a great many of those in America, Europe, and Africa who were actively concerned in African development and academic studies at this crucial time. Those who first met him in Washington after the war will recall his wide scholarly interest in the development of Africanist research and his appreciation of the plans to further these studies by institutions, many of them new, in Africa and overseas.

In 1953 he was able to take a direct and prominent part in the rapid development of African studies in the United States when he was invited to become Professor and Director of a Center for African Studies at Boston University, which was established with the aid of a grant from the Ford Foundation. This was one of the first major initiatives in the United States to foster both undergraduate teaching and research in African Studies in an interdisciplinary framework. He guided the activities of this centre for twelve years and continued his close association with it as a teacher and consultant after handing over the Directorship in 1965. Establishing intercollegiate arrangements with Harvard for the provision of courses and seminars in African studies and arranging for visits and special seminars by African and European scholars, he initiated a number of younger scholars who have since carried out extensive field researches in Africa.

Professor Brown also played a prominent part in securing support for the establishment of an African Studies Association in the United States to provide an interdisciplinary organization which would help to co-ordinate and develop the work of many new centres of teaching and research on various aspects of African studies. He served a term as President of the Association and more recently directed its activities concerning information and liaison in research. With his wide contacts, both within the United States and overseas, his knowledge and experience were much sought after at a time of rapid expansion of interest in Africa. He travelled widely in Africa. On missions for American organizations or at the invitation of universities, he visited nearly all the African countries at one time or another. With a remarkable ability to appraise situations he was an invaluable source of information and advice on plans for educational and social development in Africa.

Professor Brown joined the Executive Council of the Institute in 1954 after his appointment at Boston and served as a Consultative Director from 1957. Over these years he rendered an inestimable service to the Institute in assisting it to keep in touch with the very rapid development of African studies in the United States, in making its work more widely known there and in enlisting American support for its activities. His wise counsel and the wide range of his information concerning organizations and individual scholars engaged in developing Africanist research in America and elsewhere have been of the greatest value over a period when the Institute has needed to reconsider the scope of its work and its relations with the many new centres and organizations that are actively developing an interest in African studies.

DARYLL FORDE