

**MEMORIAL RESOLUTION OF THE FACULTY
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON**

ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR EMERITUS WILLIAM ALLEN BROWN

William Allen Brown, professor emeritus of history, died on August 28, 2007, in Madison. Bill was born on January 29, 1934, in Beauford, North Carolina, where he grew up until he joined the Air Force. On leaving military service, he enrolled in Kentucky State University, where he majored in history, government, and French language and literature, graduating with the highest distinction as valedictorian in 1959. He was then awarded a Fulbright grant to attend the Sorbonne University in Paris where he achieved outstanding results.

Upon completing his studies in France, he entered graduate school at the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a focus on African history and Islamic studies. He was awarded a number of fellowships, including a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship, a National Defense Foreign Language Fellowship in Arabic, and a Foreign Area Fellowship for Africa. He conducted research in Mali from 1965 to 1966 for his doctoral dissertation: *The Caliphate of Hamdullahi, ca. 1818–1864: A Study in African History and Tradition*, which remains the authoritative study of the area and period. He received his Ph.D. degree from UW-Madison in 1969. Later, he would complement his education as a specialist in Islam by attending the famous Al Azhar University in Cairo. While still a graduate student writing his doctoral dissertation, he organized the first conference on Black studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1967, a conference that resulted in the publication by S. Henderson and M. Cook (eds.) of *The Militant Black Writer in the U.S. and Africa*.

Bill started his teaching career at the major university for the study of Islam in West Africa—Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, Nigeria. He subsequently held positions at Yale and Harvard universities before joining the Department of History at UW-Madison in 1974, where he was in charge of West African history until his retirement in 2006. In his teaching he was renowned for his profound erudition concerning Islam in West Africa and for his deep and original insights into the history of the Atlantic slave trade, two subjects of paramount interest to all African-American intellectuals of his generation. During his first decade in Madison he was also quite involved with African-American affairs in Madison as well as in Wisconsin generally. Primarily because of ill health he became less active in community and university affairs in his later years and devoted himself to his own scholarship and teaching.

Ever the perfectionist, he never allowed his dissertation to be published, even after he had revised it several times. But he wrote two seminal articles about Islamic topics for the *Research Bulletin* of the Center of Arabic Documentation at Ahmadu Bello University as well as one contribution about the chronology of Hamdullahi for the prestigious French journal *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*. He also published *Great Rulers of the African Past* for the general public.

Bill will always occupy a special place in the memories of those who have known him well. His former colleagues and fellow alumni and alumnae in African history have funded a Bill Brown Annual Lecture Fund in the History of Islamic West Africa in his honor.

MEMORIAL COMMITTEE

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