A TRIBUTE TO ROBERT S. BROWNE

Robert S. Browne, in whose honor this special issue is conceived, is a modest man whose life and work legitimately place him among the nation’s leading economists. His vision in founding *The Review of Black Political Economy* and the Black Economic Research Center has been validated by the product of both institutions during the past two decades.

*The Review* was conceived and born at a time of heightened consciousness among black economists who wished to address serious issues related to the economic status of the black community. In 1968–69, relatively few black economists held a Ph.D. Most were either faculty members of historically black colleges and universities or professionals working for the federal government. Very few were members of the American Economic Association, and even fewer regularly attended and participated in the annual meetings of the Allied Social Sciences Association, where scholarly papers on economic topics were presented.

Bob Browne gave expression and voice to the new interest among black economists by developing a publication devoted to economic topics of special relevance to the black community. But before *The Review* was founded, Browne organized the Black Economic Research Center in Harlem. BERC was an institutional expression of the black power movement that gained prominence during the late 1960s.

During the first black power convention in Detroit, Michigan, Browne gave a speech on the economic status of the black community. Following the convention, George Foreman, the black activist who had organized the event, presented to a group of major white churches in New York City a list of demands for reparations to the black community. When, after some deliberation, the churches decided to respond favorably, they discovered that there was no appropriate organization to receive their support. After brief consideration, Browne was offered a small grant from the National Council of Churches to organize the research center that became BERC. The new center later received additional support
from the Ford Foundation, and made a significant contribution to policy research before folding during the early 1980s.

BERC provided valuable research opportunities for young black economists such as David Swinton, John Handy, Julienne Malveux, Stephanie Wilson, and Julian Ellison, who were graduate students at major universities. They shared an interest in using the tools of economic research better to understand the roots of persistent economic inequality in American life. Some of them were equally determined to develop recommendations for public policy that would eliminate such inequality. The Review was conceived as a scholarly organ to serve as a vehicle for disseminating the work of the young scholars and others who had similar interests and were doing similar work.

The Review was designed to accommodate and encourage alternative views on the analysis of racial inequality and strategies to achieve the economic empowerment of the black community. There was a widely held view that the pages of "mainstream" journals of economic literature were not available to black scholars interested in exploring nontraditional approaches to research and policy on race and economics. The preoccupation of the mainstream journals with theory and methodology further limited their usefulness as vehicles to disseminate the work of the emerging generation of black economists, many of whom were most interested in institutional issues.

Articles published in early issues of The Review were not antimethodological; rather, methodology was not presented for its own sake, but was carefully crafted to illuminate issues of central importance to the black community. Early articles by Duran Bell and John Handy displayed advanced mathematical economics, and David Swinton's work on the theory of discrimination showed a sophisticated understanding of marginal productivity theory (as was to be expected of one who completed graduate studies at Harvard under the direction of Professor Kenneth Arrow).

Bob Browne's "menu" statements, which introduced each issue of The Review, always set the context for what the reader would find in the journal. He made clear the editorial philosophy of the publication and its strong orientation toward the search for a clearer understanding of persistent racial economic inequality in American life.

Though many articles in The Review were clearly written from a leftist perspective, ideology was never lifted to the level of the holy grail. Indeed, there appeared to be a sense of ambivalence among black economists toward the research and writing of those associated with the Union