



Palgrave Entry on Harry Gunnison Brown

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Brown, Harry Gunnison (1880–1975). Harry G. Brown was born in Troy, New York, the son of an accountant. He was stricken from age four with tuberculosis of the hip. He graduated from Williams (1904) and took his PhD at Yale in 1909.

Brown instructed at Yale from 1909 to 1915, working closely with Irving Fisher. Herbert J. Davenport then hired him at the University of Missouri where he succeeded Davenport as Chair, remaining there through 1947. After retirement in 1950 he taught at The New School, The University of Mississippi, and Franklin and Marshall. During the Pennsylvania residence he campaigned vigorously, although in his eighties, for adoption of the graded tax in cities of that state, under its local-option law. He returned to Columbia, Missouri to retire, and continued publishing and speaking until his death at the age of 95.

Brown was the premier exponent among orthodox theorists of taxing land values and saw rail/utilities as generating taxable rents. There is producer surplus when rates exceed average cost. There is also consumer surplus when rates fall below average benefits. Both surpluses were locational and lodged in land rents. This led to a general interest in taxing land. He used conventional tools, careful craftsmanship, and a priori methods. Brown refuted J.B. Clark's idea that 'the lure of unearned increment' was a constructive incentive for pioneering; and Frank Knight's idea that land is like all other resources because it has an opportunity cost; and Ely's doctrine that 'ripening costs' of land speculators justify urban sprawl.

He criticized most non-land taxes, but opposed Federal deficits more than any tax, seeing deficits as competing directly for capital formation. He attributed macro problems to cost-push, pointing to overpricing of land and raw materials, which land taxation would abate; to high interest rates forced by inadequate bank reserves; to associationism in industry; and to the perverse behaviour of regulated rates under average-cost pricing, where reduced demand forces rates to rise and worsen a depression. He would increase investment opportunities by abating taxes on capital.

MASON GAFFNEY

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