



**SCHOOL OF LAW**  
TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

Texas A&M University School of Law  
**Texas A&M Law Scholarship**

---

Faculty Scholarship

---

2001

## Harold K. Jacobson (1929-2001): An Appreciation

Charlotte Ku

*Texas A&M University School of Law*, [cku@law.tamu.edu](mailto:cku@law.tamu.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.law.tamu.edu/facscholar>



Part of the [Law Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Charlotte Ku, *Harold K. Jacobson (1929-2001): An Appreciation*, 95 *Am. J. Int'l L.* 849 (2001).

Available at: <http://scholarship.law.tamu.edu/facscholar/441>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Texas A&M Law Scholarship. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Scholarship by an authorized administrator of Texas A&M Law Scholarship. For more information, please contact [sphillips64@law.tamu.edu](mailto:sphillips64@law.tamu.edu).

## NOTES AND COMMENTS

### HAROLD K. JACOBSON (1929–2001): AN APPRECIATION

Harold Karan Jacobson died in Ann Arbor, Michigan, on August 13, 2001, at age 72, after a lifetime of teaching, scholarship, and service. He had just completed more than four decades of teaching, nearly all of it in the Department of Political Science at the University of Michigan, where he held the Jesse Siddal Reeves chair. “Call me Jake” was how so many conversations with him began. “Dad loved his work,” was how one of his sons remembered him at his funeral.

Harold Jacobson was born in Detroit on June 28, 1929. He attended high school in Wyandotte, Michigan, and received a bachelor’s degree in history from the University of Michigan. He married his Michigan schoolmate Merelyn Jean Lindbloom in 1951, a year after he started graduate school at Yale. Proud of his Norwegian heritage, he fulfilled a lifelong ambition in 1996, when he traveled to Norway’s Sognefjord to see the Hovland farm from which his ancestors had emigrated to the United States.

Jacobson’s manner was quiet and soft-spoken, but his reserve masked a deep passion. That passion was to wed intellectual discipline with broad and creative thinking in order to strengthen the ability of individuals to manage the challenges of contemporary life. He was fundamentally an optimist about human behavior; he opened his path-breaking text, *Networks of Interdependence*, with the words, “This is an optimistic book, though I hope not an unrealistic one.”<sup>1</sup> He was not naive about the complexity of the issues and was impatient with overgeneralizations and uncritical judgments.

His passion and his times converged as he began his academic career. In an autobiographical account, Jacobson wrote:

These [the 1950s and early 1960s] were the early days of the behavioral revolution. We saw ourselves as budding scientists. Following the ways of natural science, we would adhere to the tenets of logical positivism. There was much emphasis in our graduate training and early self-learning on gaining insights from the behavioral sciences, especially psychology, sociology, and anthropology. We were taught that our goal should be to search for generalizations about behavior in international relations. We thought that we could discover laws that governed international behavior. Although our positivist proclivities prohibited us from proclaiming it, we hoped that the generalizations would form the basis for prescriptions.<sup>2</sup>

As a budding scientist, Jacobson was not attracted to law or international law as an intellectual pathway to understanding and conditioning human behavior. Yet he admitted that, “[e]ven in the 1950s, I could not escape a nagging sense that to ignore international law was to ignore an important part of international relations,”<sup>3</sup> noting, for example, Arnold Wolfers’s observation about states’ pursuit of milieu goals.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> HAROLD K. JACOBSON, *NETWORKS OF INTERDEPENDENCE: INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND THE GLOBAL POLITICAL SYSTEM*, at viii (2d ed. 1984).

<sup>2</sup> Harold K. Jacobson, *Doing Collaborative Research on International Legal Topics: An Autobiographical Account*, *INT’L STUD. REV.*, Spring 2001, at 15, 15–16.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* at 16.

<sup>4</sup> ARNOLD WOLFERS, *DISCORD AND COLLABORATION: ESSAYS ON INTERNATIONAL POLITICS* 3 (1962).

Thus did Jacobson begin a career-long association with many whose work was rooted in international law. This interest led to fruitful collaborations and innovative contributions to the international law literature. His collaborators included several individuals prominently associated with the *American Journal of International Law*—Eric Stein,<sup>5</sup> Edith Brown Weiss,<sup>6</sup> and Ruth Wedgwood.<sup>7</sup> Jacobson further took pride in his membership on the *AJIL* Board of Editors. He was deeply aware of his special responsibility as a social scientist in this legal environment, and was admiring of the *Journal's* commitment to fostering a broad intellectual base on its board.

True to his calling, he applied his creativity, discipline, and ability to bringing together individuals representing different disciplines, nationalities, and ages to study some of the great issues of the twentieth century:

- *Decolonization*: The study of this subject took him to Africa eight times. Those journeys followed in the footsteps of Jesse Siddal Reeves, for whom the chair Jacobson held was named. Professor Reeves was not only the first chairman of the Department of Political Science at the University of Michigan, but also a vice president of the American Society of International Law and an early contributor to the *AJIL* on Africa.
- *Environmental protection and climate change*: His 1983 book, written with David Kay, focused on the international dimension of environmental protection. It was published under the auspices of the ASIL research and studies program.<sup>8</sup>
- *International institutions and democracy*: In his last book, he led an international team of authors in exploring how trends toward democratization within states and basic constitutional understandings about the use of force fit with efforts to use military forces collectively.<sup>9</sup>

Equally important to him as interesting subjects was that the studies be broadly representative of “humankind.” A gifted team builder, Jacobson was a pioneer and leader in many international collaborations. These efforts earned him numerous accolades, which he took pride in, but rarely trumpeted. These included the Award for International Scientific Cooperation of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1995, and his election as an AAAS Fellow in 1999—he was one of a small number of social scientists to achieve that distinction. Jacobson took his professional responsibilities seriously and contributed to the institutional lives of the associations to which he belonged. These included the American Society of International Law, which he served as a member of both the Executive Council and many committees.

His insatiable curiosity, open-mindedness, delight in discovery, and appreciation of people were grounded in a strong sense of his own community and identity. Jacobson, a son of the American Midwest, was too young to have served in World War II, but not too young to help shape the world to come through scholarship and teaching, and he was eager to do so. A lifetime at the University of Michigan gave expression to a strong commitment to public education. Although his network of students, friends, and collaborators was worldwide, Michigan was always home. Every fall he made sure that we had the latest news about Wolverine football.

An inspired and devoted teacher, Jacobson achieved excellence by fostering it. He rejoiced in the achievements of others. A considerate and generous colleague, he pursued

<sup>5</sup> HAROLD K. JACOBSON & ERIC STEIN, *DIPLOMATS, SCIENTISTS, AND POLITICIANS: THE UNITED STATES AND THE NUCLEAR TEST BAN NEGOTIATIONS* (1966).

<sup>6</sup> *ENGAGING COUNTRIES: STRENGTHENING COMPLIANCE WITH INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL ACCORDS* (Edith Brown Weiss & Harold K. Jacobson eds., 1998).

<sup>7</sup> Symposium, *State Reconstruction After Civil Conflict*, 95 *AJIL* 1 (2001). Jacobson edited this symposium with Wedgwood.

<sup>8</sup> DAVID KAY & HAROLD K. JACOBSON, *ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION: THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION* (1983).

<sup>9</sup> Charlotte Ku & Harold K. Jacobson, *Broaching the Issues, in DEMOCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE USE OF FORCE IN INTERNATIONAL LAW* (Charlotte Ku & Harold K. Jacobson eds., forthcoming 2002).