

## John Wm. Johnson

Born March 14, 1942, John William Johnson grew up in Abilene, Texas. His mother was Cherokee, enabling him to register as a Cherokee national citizen in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. He graduated from high school in 1960, traveled in Europe for a few months, and entered the University of Texas in 1961, where he majored in German, graduating in 1965.

After working at the Texas State Education Agency, he entered the Peace Corps and completed training at Teachers College, Columbia University in New York, earning nine graduate credits. John spent three and a half years in the Somali Republic in East Africa teaching English and mathematics. He spent the first year in Dayaha, a remote boarding school in the north, and the second in Mogadishu, teaching and working as a translation assistant and editor for Haaji Muuse Galaal, secretary general of the UNESCO mission in Somalia and a renowned Somali folklorist and poet. Fascinated by the sociopolitical use of oral poetry, John spent his last year and a half working full time with Muuse translating Somali prose narratives and oral poetry and helping edit a volume of Somali weatherlore and astrology.

During his first year in Somalia, John met Professor B. W. Andrzejewski of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) of the University of London, who was visiting Somalia. He later corresponded with Andrzejewski, and visited him in London in 1968 during home leave. At that time John was admitted to SOAS as Andrzejewski's student and worked with him later that year and the next in Mogadishu when the professor was on sabbatical.

From 1968 to 1971 John worked on an M.Phil. degree in Somali oral poetry at SOAS. During his second year in London, he was encouraged to work for a Ph.D. in folklore at Indiana University by Professor Charles Bird, who was visiting London for a series of lectures. John entered IU in 1971 and finished candidacy in 1973, when he was awarded a dissertation grant from the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) to conduct fieldwork in Mali on *The Epic of Sunjata*.

After fieldwork John was recruited to teach Somali and Bamana languages and folklore at Michigan State University, where he remained from 1977 to 1979, finishing his dissertation in 1978. While at MSU he was recruited by IU's Folklore Institute, returning to Bloomington as full-time faculty in the fall of 1979.

John has spent 30 years on a faculty, 28 of them at Indiana University. During this time he enrolled 9,328 students in his undergraduate classes, and 427 in his graduate classes. He served on 60 dissertation and thesis committees, chairing five apiece. He delivered 84 papers at national and international conferences, published four books, two of which were republished (one in a third edition), and 51 articles (with three more in press). He has held several grants: three from the SSRC (two were Foreign Area Fellowships), three from the National Endowment for the Humanities, and one apiece from Fulbright-Hays and the American Council of Learned Societies, as well as numerous other smaller grants for research and travel. In 1987, together with other returned Peace Corps volunteers, he received the Beyond War Award for Peace from the Beyond War Foundation. In 1991–1992 he received a Faculty Open Fellowship from the Lilly Endowment. In 1994 he was made a Fellow of the Folklore Fellows Communications in Helsinki, Finland, and again in 1995 he was elected a Folklore Associate Fellow in the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters in Helsinki. In 1998, with his fellow authors, his book *Oral Epics from Africa* was awarded the Outstanding Academic Book Award by *Choice*, a journal of the Association of College and Research Libraries, a division of the American Library Association. He received a Teaching Excellence Recognition Award for 1998 from the College of Arts and Sciences and a Trustees Teaching Award for 2000–2001. He received nominations for Outstanding Instructor from the Alpha Lambda Delta Freshman Academic Honor Society in 1999 and

also a nomination for Student Choice Award for Outstanding Instructors by the Student Alumni Association in 1999 and 2001.

For many years he was secretary for research and documentation for the Somali Studies International Association, and he is a member of the African Studies Association, American Folklore Society, Anglo-Somali Society, International Society for Oral Literatures of Africa, Mande Studies Association, and Texas Folklore Society. John remains on campus and plans to continue research on favorite topics in folklore and to teach one class a semester indefinitely.