

# IN MEMORIAM

Alison Des Forges

John Middleton

C. Sylvester Whitaker, Jr.

## OBITUARIES

### C. SYLVESTER WHITAKER, JR.

C. Sylvester Whitaker, Jr., passed away on November 29, 2008 in Waterville, Maine after a long battle with cancer. He was 73 years old.

Syl Whitaker will be remembered as a good friend, thoughtful scholar, engaged teacher, and creative university administrator. His work on the emirates of northern Nigeria set the standard for scholarship in Nigeria, and remains essential reading for those who study political development, political change and issues of democratization.

Born in 1935 in Pittsburgh, PA, Whitaker was the first African American male to graduate from Swarthmore College (in 1956) and the first African American to earn a PhD in Political Science from Princeton University (in 1962). In the mid 1960s, he was the sole African American on the faculty at UCLA. In 1970, he became the first African American tenured at the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University, and in 1976 the first African American to receive tenure in Political Science at Rutgers University.

During his long and distinguished career, he held tenured appointments at UCLA, Princeton University, The City University of New York (where he held the Martin Luther King Chair), Rutgers University, and the University of Southern California. He held Fulbright Professorships at the University of Lagos and Bayero University Kano (in Nigeria). At UCLA he served as Associate Dean of the Graduate School, at Princeton University he founded the Africana Studies Program, at Rutgers he served as Chair of the University College Department of Political Science and as Director of International Programs, and at USC, until his retirement in 1996, he served as Dean of the Social Sciences and Director of the Center for Multiethnic and Transnational Studies. He was a Distinguished University Professor emeritus at U.S.C.

Whitaker's first book, *The Politics of Tradition*, published in 1970, challenged the dichotomies defining tradition and modernity in early development and modernization studies and set a new paradigm for the study of political change in non-western societies. Subsequent books included *Perspectives on the Second Republic of Nigeria* (1981); *The Unfinished State of Nigeria* (1990); *Agenda for Action: African-U.S. Cooperation* with Anatoly Gromyko (1990); *African Politics and Problems of Development* with Richard Sklar (1991); *Nigeria: Rivers of Oil, Trails of Blood* with Richard Sklar (1995), and *Second Beginnings: New Political Frameworks in Nigeria* also with Richard Sklar (2001). In all his work, Whitaker combined meticulous scholarship with trenchant observation to both challenge prevailing orthodoxies and to provide new understandings and insights.

Whitaker served on the Boards of the Friends Service and Unitarian Universalist Service Committees. He was a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and served on their Africa related committees, and was a member of the Board of the United Nations Association. A friend of Bill W's, he remained until his death on the Board of Alina Lodge in Blairstown, NJ.

He is survived by his wife, Shirley Chow Whitaker, his sons Mark and Paul Whitaker, and his grandchildren, Rachel and Matthew Whitaker, and by his adopted Nigerian family in Kazaure.

Submitted by Barbara Callaway, Rutgers University, February 4, 2009

*If you would like to make a submission to the "In Memoriam" or "Obituaries" section of the ASA News, please send the submission to Kristina Carle, Program Manager, Publications and Information Services at [publications@africanstudies.org](mailto:publications@africanstudies.org). For obituaries, the submissions are published on a first come first serve basis. The maximum length for an obituary is 500 words. The deadlines for submission are December 1, March 1, and June 1.*