

# IN MEMORIAM

Philip D Curtin

Glen Elder

John Hope Franklin

Gerti Hesselring

## OBITUARIES

### JOHN FRANCIS MARCHMANT MIDDLETON

It has been with great sadness that friends and colleagues of John Middleton received the news of his death in New Haven, Connecticut, on 27 February 2009. Paraphrasing Swahili wisdom, as cited by Parker Shipton, "The tree has fallen far away, but the branches have reached us all here."

John was born near London, but for 10 years worked regularly on a family sheep farm in central England which he believed may have sparked his early interest in land tenure. He attended, a "good" though not prestigious boys' school and earned a Latin scholarship to go on to University College London, where he majored in English. During World War II he was evacuated to Aberystwyth in Wales. There he met anthropologist Daryll Forde. In 1941 John was drafted, sent to Africa, learned Swahili and taught in the East African Education Corps. He saw much of Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika, Madagascar, Mauritius -- valuable to his future in anthropology.

In 1946 John returned to UCL to do a BSc in the new Anthropology Department under Daryll Forde. He then went to Oxford to study first with Max Gluckman and then E.E. Evans-Pritchard, who became his advisor. John's Oxford cohort included Mary Douglas, Clyde Mitchell, Laura and Paul Bohannans, Elizabeth Colson, Ioan Lewis. He carried out his doctoral research among the Lugbara in northwest Uganda. The most lasting sensibility that he gained on that first field trip was that one can only learn what the people want you to know -- that learning is a joint project. Thus he came to understand the peoples' concerns as local politics as his initial interest in land tenure gave way to the Lugbara's in myth and ritual.

A product of the founding generation of British social anthropologists working in Africa, John went on to teach and mentor succeeding generations. After receiving his doctorate in 1953 he taught briefly at Birkbeck College, the University of Cape Town, and Rhodes University, before settling back into University College London, with Mary Douglas, Phyllis Kaberry, and other contemporaries of similar renown. During this period he also did research on land tenure in Zanzibar.

John spent time teaching in the United States, a Visiting Professor at the University of Virginia and University of Oregon, then to Northwestern in 1963 as Professor of Anthropology until 1966. In 1966, he was invited to establish a new program in Anthropology at New York University. Then in 1972 he returned to London as a professor at the School of Oriental and African Studies; he was made director of the International African Institute and editor of *Africa*. Attracted by the openness and vibrancy of African studies and anthropology in the United States, in 1981 John joined the Department of Anthropology at Yale University. He secured Yale's first US Department of Education Title VI African studies center award, established Yale's MA program in African studies and strengthened its Program in African Languages. John recruited international students to Yale and worked tirelessly to secure support for them. He was also most generous in support for junior colleagues and students. His research during this period resulted in the publication of *The World of the Swahili: An African Mercantile Civilization*, the most cited work in Swahili studies, in 1992. Caught in the time-trap of a brief (and ultimately unconstitutional) mandatory retirement age of 70 for university faculty, he became a reluctant emeritus in 1991. But he never stopped teaching, spending time at Frankfurt, Mainz, Bristol, Durban, and Yale's Council on African Studies, or publishing: he continued writing on the Swahili and drawing skillfully on the vast network of colleagues and friends whom he had assembled over more than fifty years in the field, he edited the four-volume *Encyclopedia of Africa South of the Sahara* (Scribners, 1997), and, with Joseph Miller, a five volume second edition in 2007. And he supported his friends and colleagues in their endeavors.