

IN MEMORIAM

Robert O. Collins

Jill Dias

ROBERT O. COLLINS

Robert Oakley Collins, 75, distinguished historian of Africa and of the Sudan and long-time professor and dean at the UC, Santa Barbara, passed away on April 11.

In a career devoted to the study of Africa's Upper Nile Valley, particularly Sudan, historian Robert O. Collins wrote books and articles that were considered required reading for scholars and students of Africa.

The US government sought his insight on the conflict in Darfur and on Osama bin Laden. Hollywood filmmakers asked his advice in depicting the region on screen. A former president of Sudan presented Collins with a distinguished award for scholarship.

Robert Oakley Collins was born in Waukegan, IL, on April 1, 1933. His interest in Africa was ignited while browsing the library at Dartmouth University in the 1950s.

"He found the Africa area and he just became enthralled," said his daughter, Catharine Collins Kristian. "At the time, it was an emerging area. All the colonial countries were either leaving or talking about granting independence."

Collins traveled to Sudan in 1956, the year the country gained independence. It was the first of many trips and the beginning of a lifelong relationship with the nation, Kristian said.

After earning a bachelor's degree from Dartmouth in 1954, Collins earned many other degrees in History: Bachelor's and master's degrees from Oxford University's Balliol College in 1956 and 1960, as well as a master's degree and a doctorate from Yale University in 1958 and 1959. He was fluent in Arabic.

Collins taught for brief periods at Williams College in Massachusetts and at Columbia University in New York before joining the faculty of UC, Santa Barbara in 1965.

For 10 years Collins served as dean of the graduate division. After his retirement in 1994 he continued to teach, write, and mentor. With his doctoral students he was demanding, affable and always available.

"He wanted us to have a holistic understanding of African history from the beginning of times to modern times. And he was tough," said Scopas S. Poggo, a native of Sudan who is now an assistant professor of African American and African studies at Ohio State University.

Collins wrote or co-wrote at least 30 books and many articles. His book *"Shadows in the Grass: Britain in the Southern Sudan, 1918-1956"* won the John Ben Snow Foundation Prize for the best book in British studies in 1984.

An eloquent public speaker, Collins brought strong storytelling skills to his writing, melding them with meticulous research. *"Alms for Jihad: Charity and Terrorism in the Islamic World"* was also thoroughly researched, "our interpretations judicious, our conclusions made in good faith on the available evidence," Collins wrote in his online essay.

In addition to his daughter, Collins is survived by two sons, Randolph William Collins of Healdsburg, CA, and Robert Ware Collins of San Jose; two brothers, Jack Gore Collins of Portland, OR, and George William Collins II of Chesterland, OH; and five grandchildren.

There will be no public memorial service. Memorial donations may be sent to the Sudan-American Foundation for Education (SAFE), 141 N. Henderson Road, No. 1205, Arlington, VA 22203.

Submitted by Kathleen Sheldon, U of California - Los Angeles, April 25, 2008.