

**Obituary delivered at the memorial service
for Professor Boniface Obichere**

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One of the ironies of being an UCLA Africanist is that it is often easier to get to know one's colleagues in Africa than at UCLA, and so it was for me. I first met Boniface when I was teaching at the University of Ghana and he was a visiting scholar in 1970. I had, however, known of Boniface's legendary prowess as an entertaining and stimulating teacher from my niece who had been a member of one of his first UCLA classes. It was partly through my 1970's contact with him that I ultimately came to UCLA when Boniface was director of the African Studies Center. I remain forever grateful for his initiative. I was to meet and talk with Boniface several times more in Africa- He was at that time one of a new generation of African historians, trained in the West, stimulating their colleagues in Africa with a new vision and a dynamic approach moving from the highly localized myths of origin, descriptions of state formation and of early trade and state politics that had so characterized an earlier generation of West Africans schooled largely in the universities of Africa. Boniface invigorated his colleagues in the historical dialectic involved with the feedback from past to present and present to past, particularly in the examination of oil, military rule and dictatorship in Africa. He enlivened both his conference remarks and more popular lectures with anecdotes which made his contributions that much more memorable and amusing. He was at his intellectual summit at a conference that he organized on military rule at the University of Ghana in the late 1970's which attracted scholars from all over Africa at a time when military dictatorship was at its peak.

Boniface, as had previous ASC directors before him, made UCLA an household name, a trusted commodity in African scholarship. He used his office to attract some of the most formidable African scholars to UCLA and many of the contacts he made have grown into invaluable networks for a younger generation of UCLA Africanists. Always, when I went back to West Africa, whatever the country, someone was sure to ask when Professor Obichere would be visiting. He was respected and admired and welcomed because of the spirit he

brought to specialist conferences in Africa, many organized through the aegis of UNESCO or similar international or regional agencies where his expertise in Dahomean history and some of the broader issues of African history made him a bridge between Francophone and Anglophone academics. It is for this inter-African, pan-African contribution that Boniface will be long remembered as well as for his lively interest in the African diaspora, of which he was always willing to share his knowledge. I was proud to give lectures with him in symposia dealing with the African impact on American culture first in the Center for African American Studies in the mid 1980's and later at a panel I organized for the Quincentennial conference at UCLA in 1992. I was personally grateful for the many times he agreed to serve on the MA and doctoral committees of my students researching the archaeology of the slave trade era. Boniface, we mourn you but your legacy will live.