

David W. Robinson, professor emeritus of history and African studies at Michigan State University, was a pioneer in the writing of the history of Muslim communities in Africa. Coming to Michigan State in 1978 after teaching for several years at Yale, Robinson went on to receive MSU's distinguished faculty and distinguished professor awards in back-to-back years (1991 and 1992). In the 1960s and 1970s, when African history was emerging as a new area of study, historians of Africa were mainly concerned with reconstructing the history of the pre-colonial states and telling the story of the Atlantic Slave trade. They left the study of religion to the social scientists. Going against the grain, Robinson made an important contribution by both focusing on the history of the Muslim communities that form the majority of the population of West Africa and demonstrating the critical importance of local written and oral sources for a credible reconstruction of the African past. Because of his original and masterful scholarship, Robinson is celebrated as one of the most influential historians of West Africa. He has been at the core of an African history program that has trained many fine historians of Africa that are now teaching and training on their own in universities across the country.