

PROMOTION RECOMMENDATION
The University of Michigan
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts

Approved by the Regents
May 20, 2010

Paul C. Johnson, associate professor of history, with tenure, and associate professor of Afroamerican and African studies, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, is recommended for promotion to professor of history, with tenure, and professor of Afroamerican and African studies, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.

Academic Degrees:

Ph.D.	1997	University of Chicago
M.A.	1990	University of Chicago
B.A.	1986	Hope College

Professional Record:

2005 – present	Associate Professor, Department of History and Center for Afroamerican and African Studies (CAAS), University of Michigan
2003 – 2005	Associate Professor, Department of Religious Studies, University of Missouri
1997-2002	Assistant Professor, Department of Religious Studies, University of Missouri

Summary of Evaluations:

Teaching – Professor Johnson makes invaluable teaching contributions History and CAAS. His approach is distinguished by an excellent ability to engage students in the small undergraduate classroom. Challenging them with unfamiliar perspectives on superficially familiar topics, he consistently wins their respect by the sincerity and inventiveness of his pedagogy. He is committed to the goal of developing a broad interdisciplinary introduction to religion for undergraduates. In the meantime he is director of the anthropology/history joint Ph.D. program and is teaching the two-term core seminar. Unfailingly generous with his time, he is an outstanding mentor for students at all levels. His courses are invariably cross-listed in History and CAAS, as well as in Latin American and Caribbean Studies (LACS) and Religion.

Research – Professor Johnson is an outstanding historian of African Diaspora religions in the Americas. Trained as a scholar in religious studies, he can be variously described as an historical anthropologist, a historian of concepts or ideas, and a historian or ethnographer of consciousness. He is a true boundary-crosser, equally at home in religious studies, anthropology, and history, while working at the core of CAAS and LACS. His latest book, *Diaspora Conversions*, tracks a popular religion back and forth between the Caribbean, Central America, and metropolitan New York in a brilliant demonstration of the value and possibilities of transnational history. His next major project on spirit possession and civil religion will confirm his standing at the very forefront of his field.

Recent and Significant Publications:

Diaspora Conversions: Black Carib Religion and the Recovery of Africa, University of California Press, 2007.

“On leaving and joining Africanness through religion: The ‘Black Caribs’ across multiple diasporic horizons,” *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 37(2), 2007, pp. 174-211.
“Secretism and the apotheosis of Duvalier,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 74(2), 2006, pp. 420-445.
“Savage civil religion,” *Numen*, 52, 2005, pp. 289-324.

Service – During his three Michigan years, Professor Johnson has been an excellent citizen, serving on the Executive Committee in CAAS (2006-2008) and the Anthropology-History Joint Ph.D. Program (2005-2008), before stepping up as the latter’s current director. He has been an active mentor to junior colleagues in CAAS. In the wider arena, he remains highly sought after for executive boards, steering committees, and editorial boards.

External Review:

Reviewer (A)

“Grounded empirically and historically in intensive fieldwork and archival research, while conceptually rooted in Weberian social theory, this second book [*Diaspora Conversions*] contributes significantly to new frameworks and debates in multi-sited ethnography in the global cultural economy. It also pushed beyond the two dominant paradigms in Africa diaspora studies: those of the ‘dispersion’ and ‘circulation’ models, by locating the place of Africa in the epicycles of ritual and social exchange between Brooklyn and Honduras. For these reasons it was awarded the Wesley-Logan Prize by the American Historical Association in 2008.”

Reviewer (B)

“...Johnson is an exemplary historian of religions, pursuing significant historical and ethnographic research in African diaspora religion that is advancing method and theory in the study of religion more generally. He positions himself at the intersection of history and ethnography... ...I hold Paul Johnson’s work in high regard. ...the university is fortunate to have him...”

Reviewer (C)

“I would characterize Professor Johnson’s field of expertise as the history and practice of religion in the African Atlantic Diaspora, a field that combines both historical and anthropological theories/methods and is rich with so many complex and multiple historical and social forces that it is an essential area of study for any serious, ‘well-balanced’ history department based in the USA, and certainly for any Center of Afroamerican/African Studies program. ... From what I have read, I would say he stands among the very best scholars working in the field of Africa Diaspora religions.”

Reviewer (D)

“I consider Paul to be one of the most significant scholars working on Afro-Atlantic religion and history today. He describes himself in his statement very well as an ‘ethnographer of historical consciousness,’ and as such he is a scholar whose work both informs and challenges the field of history. Because the challenges of writing the history of the Afro-Atlantic world so often revolve precisely around the difficulty of reconstructing the experiences of the enslaved, such work...is absolutely crucial to our understanding of the past, and the links between past and present.”

Reviewer (E)

"I would say that his sophisticated theoretical bent together with his interest in the African diaspora (he has written brilliantly on the very notion of diaspora) are of enormous value both to the Department of History and the Center for Afroamerican and African Studies. He also has remarkable erudition in his chosen field of study and beyond. But perhaps the greatest value of his scholarship is his sophisticated treatment of structure and agency."

Reviewer (F)

"...he continues to be an outstanding scholar. ... He is fully in command of his sources and, with the ones with which I'm most familiar, he gets them right every time. ... I find Paul Johnson a master of critical theory and an outstanding historian of ideas."

Reviewer (G)

"...I was a little taken aback [sic] because I assumed that he already held the rank of full professor because his work is so excellent, so original, and so highly regarded, and because both of his books were groundbreaking and deservedly praised, admired, and honored. ... He is a great scholar and we are all beneficiaries of his dedication to the fields in which he works so ably and with such originality."

Reviewer (H)

"...I consider him to be an unusually creative and original scholar whose work is truly interdisciplinary in the best sense of the term, combining in a very exciting way the fields of religious studies, anthropology, history, and Afroamerican studies. ... Johnson is without question one of the most innovative and theoretically sophisticated scholars in the field of religious studies. ... I expect this [his next book, *Spirit Possession*] to be the first piece of a much larger project that has the potential to be even more ground-breaking than Johnson's first two books and set a new standard for the fields of religious studies and anthropology."

Summary of Recommendation:

Professor Johnson is an excellent scholar who is doing ground-breaking work. He is highly regarded by his students and is a model of citizenship and collegiality. The Executive Committee of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts and I recommend that Associate Professor Paul C. Johnson be promoted to the rank of professor of history, with tenure, and professor of Afroamerican and African studies, with tenure, in the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.



Terrence J. McDonald
Arthur F. Thurnau Professor,
Professor of History and Dean
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts

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