

John M. Thompson (1926–2017)

John M. (Jack) Thompson, a specialist in diplomatic and modern Russian history, a passionate and innovative teacher and a long-time member of the Department of History at Indiana University, died peacefully on March 6, 2017, in Ponte Vedra, Florida. He was 90.

Born March 30, 1926, in San Juan, Puerto Rico to American parents, Jack grew up in rural New York, where he acquired a life-long love of nature and the outdoors. After graduating from high school in June 1942, he entered Amherst College, interrupting his studies there to serve in the US Navy from 1944 to 1946. Jack completed his B. A. at Amherst magna cum laude in 1947 and went on to study at Columbia University's Russian Institute, where he earned an M.A. and Ph.D. in modern Russian history. Eager for practical experience, Jack entered the Foreign Service and served from 1954 to 1957 as Second Secretary at the American Embassy in Indonesia, reporting on Soviet-Indonesian relations and the Indonesian Communist Party.

After temporary appointments at Rutgers and Columbia universities, Jack joined the Department of History at Indiana University, where he taught from 1959 to 1976. He was one of the founders and early builders of Indiana University's internationally prominent Russian and East European Institute. A greatly admired undergraduate teacher, he developed a strong interest in methods of teaching and learning and in the interface between secondary and undergraduate education. His teaching at the graduate level was similarly distinguished. Jack mentored the advanced research and writing of over two dozen Indiana University doctoral students in Russian and Soviet history.

In 1976, Jack left Indiana to join the American Universities Field Staff (a consortium of universities focused on study of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East), where he served until 1984, first as its associate director and later as its executive director. He also held visiting professorships at the US Air Force Academy, the Air War College, the University of Hawaii, the State University of New York at Plattsburg, the Semester at Sea Program of the University of Pittsburgh, Dartmouth College, California State University at Fullerton, and the University of Southern Maine. He retired to Phippsburg, Maine, in 1988. In recent years he created and taught a variety of innovative adult learning courses at the Midcoast Senior College in Brunswick, Maine, a continuing education center that he helped found in 2002 and where he continued to teach until his death.

Twice a research scholar in the exchange program to the Soviet Union, Jack also visited the USSR and Russia as a member of the US-USSR Textbook Study Project. A member of Phi Beta Kappa and a Guggenheim Fellow (1968), he was vice-president of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies in 1961, chairman of the board of directors of the Social Science Research Council from 1979 to 1981, and a consultant to the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Fulbright Program, and other organizations.

Jack's most important scholarly work, *Russia, Bolshevism, and the Versailles Peace* (1966), focused on the post-World War I armistice and peace talks as they related to the victorious allies' varied and evolving concerns about revolutionary Russia and its future. Long before western and Soviet diplomatic archives became available for examination, his well-crafted study presented a remarkably accurate, comprehensive, and balanced account of this pivotal moment in international history. In a review in the *Journal of Modern History* (September, 1970), the British historian Hugh Seton-Watson wrote prophetically: "When the British papers are exhaustively analyzed, when the French unlock their cupboards, and when finally the gates of Moscow are thrown open, we shall no doubt learn many more details, but one may doubt whether the picture will be very substantially changed." It was not. Moreover, the book's insights into Russia's relationship with the west remain remarkably relevant today.

Jack was also the author of three textbooks, still widely used: *Revolutionary Russia, 1917* (1981); *A Vision Unfulfilled: Russia and the Soviet Union in the Twentieth Century* (1996, with William Ewing Gleason); and *Russia and the Soviet Union: A Historical Introduction from the Kievan State to the Present* (2013). He was coauthor with Howard D. Mehlinger of *Count Witte and the Tsarist Government in the Revolution of 1905* (1972).

A warm and endearing man, Jack will be remembered by his students, colleagues, and wide circle of friends for his wisdom, passion, and invariably caring nature. He loved life and left it on his own terms. He will be missed most of all by his beloved wife of 68 years, Anne Fiske (Friskie) Thompson, and by his five children, thirteen grandchildren, and three great grandchildren.

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