Charles Johnson

~ Biography ~

Dr. Charles Johnson is one of America's leading writers of novels, short stories, and essays. The recipient of the 1990 National Book Award for his novel Middle Passage, he has also published three other novels, Faith and the Good Thing (1974), Oxherding Tale (1982), which won the 1983 Washington State Governor's Award for Literature, and Dreamer (1998). Johnson's collection of short stories, The Sorcerer's Apprentice (1986), was one of five finalists for the 1987 PEN/Faulkner Award.

Johnson's latest book, Turning the Wheel: Essays on Buddhism and Writing, explores the unique and dynamic significance of Buddhism and writing. In the preface, Johnson explains, “were it not for the Buddhadharma, I'm convinced that, as a black American and an artist, I would not have been able to successfully negotiate my last half century of life in this country. Or at least not with a high level of creative productivity.” In this collection of essays, Johnson writes of the profound connection between Buddhism and creativity, and of the role of Eastern philosophy in the quest for a free and thoughtful life. He looks at basic Buddhist principles and practices, demonstrating how Buddhism is both the most revolutionary and most civilized of possible human choices. He discusses fundamental Buddhist practices such as the Eightfold Path, Taming the Mind, and Sangha and illuminates their place in the American Civil Rights movement. These essays confirm that writing and reading, along with Buddhism, are the basic components that make up a thoughtful life.

Johnson is the distinguished Pollock Professor of English at the University of Washington in Seattle and will be in residence at the Barrett Honors College at Arizona State University as the Centennial Lecturer November 16-21, 2003.