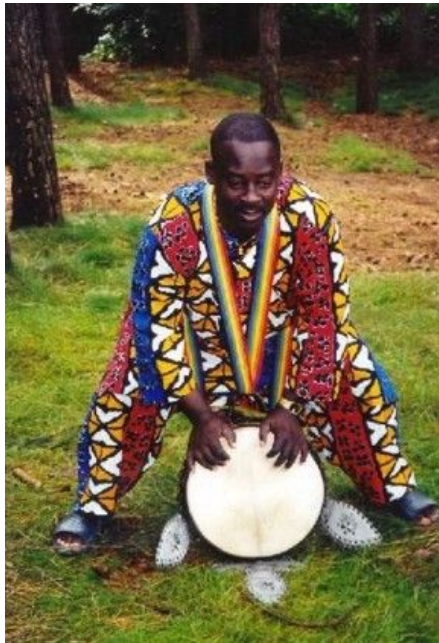


Griot

By Badiyyah Waajid



Some of the most amazing aspects of my Fulbright studies in Senegal were the visits from experts and professionals who spoke to us on various topics. I was particularly interested in the discussion on Senegalese griots. I have always been interested in details related to these rather fascinating and powerful figures; so much so that in the 1980's I visited the African Museum at the Washington D.C Smithsonian Institute to read and study the written information available on the topic. That information was rather general in nature compared to our lecturer on this day. At this time I was able to better understand that the griot is the keeper of an oral history of the village and of each family within the village. The griot is from a line of griots---his father; his father's father; his father's father's father---all the way back. Some say the concept of griot has been around since the 13th century.

According to our lecturer, the village griot has knowledge of a family's history back for eighteen 18 generations. Just to think, how many great grandparents would that be? I have a particular interest in this because recently my youngest daughter and I have spent an inordinate number of hours in our State library archives searching our family's history. Our finding have been limited, however, mainly due to the impact of slavery. We did access the services of African Ancestry for a DNA match to determine which country sprung our maternal lineage. Of course there are those who question the legitimacy of this type of finding. Well, any way back to the griot and the thought of how confident a Senegalese villager must feel while learning from the village griot. Even more, how various members from their own family have contributed to the well-being of the village.

Apparently the griot is not the run-of-the-mill storyteller. In the true tradition of the motherland, he uses musical instruments and singing to impart this knowledge. He is involved in initiations, arrangements for marriage, marriage, births and deaths in the village--all part of the history. In what may be described as a type of apprenticeship, the young son accompanies his griot father to various auspicious occasions so that he will learn from an early age what will be expected as a griot; his future responsibilities to the village.

Learn More about the [Griot](#).