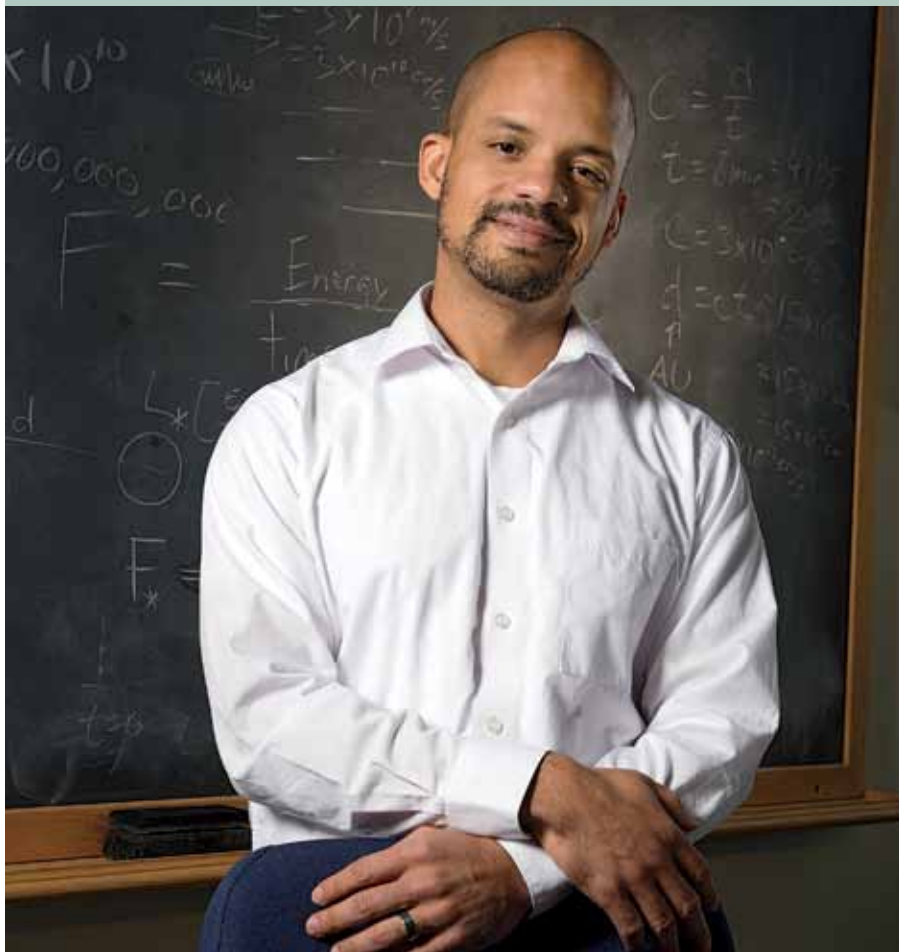


ship trailed *North Korea's*, Senior General Than Shwe, the ruler from 1992 to 2010, “once considered spending a billion dollars to buy Manchester United as a gift to his grandson, a soccer fan.”) Some of the ethnic areas, in turn, are not so much governed as run by armed militias, which exact funds from smuggling, tolls, and other “distributions.” Countrywide, powerful elites have enriched themselves by exploiting natural resources (what economists call the “commodities curse”) that, properly shared, could pay for Myanmar’s desperately needed development.

The Taylors, running an apolitical social enterprise, are perhaps uniquely poised to proceed down both paths at once: working with individual farm households under extremely challenging circumstances *and* raising policymakers’ sights as they encourage nascent civic life and the return of private enterprise in a place that has effectively had neither for decades. Debbie, Burmese by birth, was educated around the world as her father, a forester, undertook assignments for the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. After she graduated from Middlebury College and Jim from the University of Washington, they met in 1978 while working on rural health clinics and urban revitalization in the Mississippi Delta. From there, married, they moved to Cambodia in 1985 as country directors for the Mennonite Central Committee: two of the first six Americans in Cambodia helping it begin to right itself after the Khmer Rouge holocaust. As they tried to rebuild shattered health systems and irrigation, and to launch rural industries, they came into contact with policy analyst Thomas Vallely, then Vietnam program director for the Harvard Institute for International Development (HIID, a development-advisory service)—and realized the value of an education in policymaking.

Following their Kennedy School stint, they redeployed to Indonesia for seven years, where both were economic policy advisers—and where Debbie began engaging with Myanmar under the auspices of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP, sometimes with HIID economist David Dapice) and later the World Bank. During several subsequent years in California, Jim earned an M.B.A. and worked in business and as an entrepreneur, and Debbie focused on being a soccer mom to their two children—while continuing to

HARVARD PORTRAIT



John Asher Johnson

John Asher Johnson, his wife, Erin Johnson, and their young sons Owen and Marcus meandered by car from Caltech to Cambridgeport last summer—a mere flick of an eye for the new professor of astronomy, who studies exoplanets, light years away. (Some 800 exoplanets are known, as many are being confirmed, and there are thought to be billions to trillions.) An enthusiastic teacher, Johnson outlines his field using the “Exoplanets Explained” video, in the PhD TV series on YouTube: the voices are his and his graduate students’, happily distinguishing Doppler-effect, radial-velocity planet detection from direct imaging, star transits, gravitational microlensing, and other techniques. All are in use at Harvard’s exoplanet research group, which he calls “unique in astronomy.” At Caltech, he was the team; here, colleagues include professors David Charbonneau (in whose office Johnson is camping out during a sabbatical year) and Dimitar Sasselov, lecturer David Latham, and others. Because Harvard teaching opportunities are innovative and diverse, he says, in Cambridge, “I can be a university professor in the fullest sense,” building on the nonhierarchical ethos he established at his “ExoLab” in Pasadena. When he is not playing basketball, bicycling, building Legos with the boys, or preparing to teach the introductory stellar and planetary astronomy course this spring, Johnson thinks about deploying future observational instruments on Earth and in orbit. He aims for “unambiguous detection of life signatures outside our solar system within our lifetimes.” Unlike other astronomical objects, he has written, planets “inspire a subtle emotional curiosity...because they alone can be thought of as places, not things.”