

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Thank you for your part in celebrating "Promoting African Studies since 1957" during the African Studies Association's 50th Anniversary! As many of you may be aware, initial discussions concerning founding the ASA took place in Washington, DC in 1947. The ASA was founded a decade later, March 22-24, 1957 at the Roosevelt Hotel in New York. Since then, the ASA's mission, "to bring together people with a scholarly and professional interest in Africa," has resulted in a vibrant collectivity that has transformed the Association into the premier source of expertise on Africa that it is today. The shared vision of the ASA membership is no less compelling in 2008, and we look forward to a fantastic 50th Anniversary of the ASA's first Annual Meeting, November 13-16, in Chicago!

We can reflect on the ASA at Fifty by the numbers: one newsletter, two journals, nine awards and prizes (now ten, thanks to a \$100,000 bequest from the Kennell A. Jackson, Jr. estate), fourteen Board members, thirty-five coordinate organizations, 400 institutional subscribers, 1800 individual members (compared to 48 founding fellows), and, in 2007, nearly 2,000 annual meeting participants. These numbers are the result of collaboration between three important pillars: the ASA membership, the ASA Board, and the ASA Secretariat. I feel honored to have served the ASA as Executive Director during its 50th year, which witnessed a brand new website and logo; a referendum to update the ASA's bylaws; an online membership directory; and the inauguration of a Strategic Planning Committee. Your input to complete "Fifty Fabulous Firsts" will help the Association appreciate important moments in its history (the document is on the website).

As an interdisciplinary association, the ASA provides opportunities for Africanists to publish, to present their latest research and professional experiences during the Annual Meeting, and to network, in the process

promoting the exchange of ideas beyond disciplinary and professional boundaries. As an area studies association, the ASA is an increasingly important conduit for African intellectual and professional life both inside and outside the continent. ASA members directly confront public issues on a routine basis, including political and other topics that highlight Africa's complexity and diversity, past and present. Uniquely, the ASA and its members impact on many disciplines and professional communities, with cross-fertilization that not only is absorbed within these disciplines and communities, but is profoundly creative across them. This engagement with academics, government officials, non-governmental organization leaders, policymakers, and others is an essential part of the ASA's mission.

I have enjoyed working with the ASA's award and prize committee members, board members, coordinate organizations, journal editors, local arrangements committee members, nomination committee members, program committee members, and individual members during the past five years. I salute the Secretariat staff for their dedication and passion over the years: Carmen Alava, Kristina Carle, Kimme Carlos, Elizabeth Ciccone, Renee Dutta, Maggie McLaughlin, and Sandra Smith. It has been rewarding to be a part of shaping the Association that we all can celebrate fifty years after its founding.

Much has been accomplished, but much also remains to be done. The Board and the Secretariat are working hard to incorporate your feedback for an increasingly strengthened Association. I look forward to ASA members' continuing engagement throughout the coming year. Your ideas and financial contributions, including to the 50 Year Anniversaries Fundraising Campaign, are an investment in the future. Together, we will build on our successes.