

AFRICAN STUDIES BULLETIN



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EDITORIAL

With this Bulletin, the field of African studies in the United States takes another step in the sequence of its development during the past decade. The steady crescendo of this development that has characterized its relatively short existence among recognized and accepted area fields has impressed observers both here and abroad, wherever there are those who are occupied with African affairs.

It began, perhaps, with the abortive attempt of an ad hoc Committee during the War to organize an International Conference on Africa. The next step was when the Carnegie Corporation of New York extended its program of grants to Universities for area studies to include the African field, gave funds for fellowships, and added to its area operations by sending out to Africa small groups of mature scholars for "look-see" tours -- a remarkably astute move, as is shown by the number of participants in these tours who are now, as confirmed Africanists, Fellows of this Association. Then, in this area of encouragement, came the Ford Foundation grants to Northwestern, Boston, and Howard Universities, and the extension of its Field Training Fellowships Program to include Africa, followed by other institutions which established African Area Programs without outside support.

In the meantime, the growing number of Africanists were casting about for ways to facilitate communication among themselves, since the fewness of our members too often meant isolation from those of like concern. This stream of interest culminated in a grass-roots movement, so to speak, that brought about the formation of the African Studies Association. This Bulletin, the Annual Meeting, and the other mechanisms we hope to establish, will enable the constantly increasing number of specialists in the study of Africa to profit from the personal contacts and exchange of ideas that is a basic requirement for development in any field of scholarship.



The importance of all this is underscored by the fact that the Association is essentially a body of scholars, formed to encourage scholarly investigation. It is based on the recognition of the contribution that scholarship can make to an understanding of the vast, often dramatic sequences of events that characterize the Africa of the present day. We move on the assumption that for the social sciences and the humanistic disciplines, Africa is a veritable laboratory, in which the dynamics of human experience can be studied under optimum conditions of understanding and historical control. Whether it be politics or music, religion or economics, present manifestations can be seen in the light of the developments, certainly during the past seventy-five or one hundred years, and the forces that are under play assessed in a manner scarcely possible in few other parts of the world. Not only this, but the variety of languages and cultural orientations that antedated the period of recent contact with peoples and customs from outside render possible the comparative studies that are essential if we are to make analyses that have the depth needed to give adequate discernment.

In this, of course, we must build on and complement the work of our fellow-Africanists in other countries, whose cooperation has been a significant factor in developing the corps of American students of Africa represented by our Association. We hope that through the very fact of our having organized, and through the information concerning our activities this Bulletin will make available to them, our colleagues in Africa and Europe will become aware of the range of what we are doing as we, from the time of the inception of African studies in the United States, have been aware of their contributions.

Thus, with consciousness of the opportunities we have in Africa for the study of problems that have implications of the highest importance for the scientific study of human activity as well as for the resolution of some of the critical questions of a practical nature that beset man in his effort to achieve world-wide adjustment, we launch this Bulletin of our Association.

Melville J. Herskovits, President