

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Congratulations to the African Studies Association on its 50th Anniversary! The founding meeting of the ASA took place March 22-24, 1957 in the Roosevelt Hotel in New York, New York. The date was noted during this year's March 22 second annual ASA Presidential Lecture at Rutgers U, which serves as the host institution for the ASA Secretariat. The warmly received lecture, "Ralph Bunche the Africanist," was delivered by President Pearl Robinson, who was introduced by Aliko Songolo, ASA Vice President and Abena Busia, Acting Director, Rutgers U Center for African Studies.

The Association has evolved considerably since 1957, when it was founded as a non-profit organization open to all individuals and institutions interested in African affairs. The ASA's central mission, to bring together people with a scholarly and professional interest in Africa, is vibrantly manifest during the Annual Meeting, which has grown over the years to an average attendance of 1800 scholars and practitioners, including local K-12 educators and representatives from the media. With nearly 250 panels, roundtables, and plenary sessions, 50 exhibit booths, and 50 films in the Video Marketplace, the Annual Meeting ignites interdisciplinary thought, reflection, collaboration, and exchange that is profoundly rewarding, both professionally and personally. The Association's annual publications, *ASA News*, *African Studies Review*, and *History in Africa*, reach an ever wider audience, particularly through the ASA's participation in JSTOR and Project Muse, and the ASA's Awards and Prizes recognize excellence that makes us all proud. Now an increasingly diverse 2,200 individual and institutional members strong, the ASA is uniquely the leading organization that promotes African studies in the world.

I am pleased to announce that the first phase of the new online membership directory, which lists the current members' names and affiliations, was inaugurated in February. During the second phase, current members will be

able to manipulate the directory to facilitate networking with colleagues. The Call for Proposals for the 50th Annual Meeting, October 18-21 at the Sheraton New York Hotel and Towers, received an enthusiastic response. In reviewing the proposals, Program Chair Stanlie James (Arizona State U) and her Committee will endeavor to ensure intellectual stimulation of the highest quality. The Local Arrangements Committee, co-chaired by Carolyn Brown (Rutgers U) and Bertrade Ngo-Ngijol Banoum (Lehman College-CUNY), has exciting plans for a festive and memorable occasion. The Annual Meeting Preliminary Program will be posted to the website in July. On the publications front, this edition of the *ASA News* has been redesigned for the new electronic format and a redesigned website is on the near horizon. Watch www.africanstudies.org for updates on all these exciting developments!

In addition to the initiatives mentioned above, the Board is working to strengthen the ASA's ability to achieve its mission. Alongside the fundraising efforts of the 50 Year Anniversaries Campaign, chaired by Ned Alpers (UCLA), a Board-appointed Ad hoc Strategic Planning Committee chaired by Sandra Barnes (U of Pennsylvania) is engaged in charting the course for the Association's financial and programmatic future. In anticipation that the Board will implement Strategic Planning Committee recommendations, the Board is in the process of preparing a referendum to update the process and the requirements for amending the Association's Bylaws and to formally change the ASA's fiscal year from July 1-June 30 to the January-December calendar year. Information about the referendum will follow.

In closing, please support the "\$50 for the 50th" appeal. In addition to reaching the goal of \$500,000 by 2008, achieving a high percentage of member participation is extremely important to attracting outside funding. If each of us contributes to the "\$50 for the 50th" appeal and to the general endowment, we will collectively help the Association to build on its successes, and to ensure a solid foundation for "promoting African studies" for the next 50 years - and beyond!