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EDITORIAL NOTE

The New Directions series of papers

New Directions is a series of the former Joint Committee on African Studies (JCAS) of the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) and the US Social Science Research Council (SSRC). The purpose of New Directions is to open or reopen a field of African studies which has been neglected or in which not enough new work has been done. It is intended as a forum for innovation, and for challenging rather than surveying research agenda and received wisdoms that have shaped understandings of Africa. Other papers in the series have appeared in the *African Studies Review* and *Cahiers d'études africaines*. Professor Widner's paper on 'social capital' is the first in the series.