

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I am pleased to announce that an inaugural Annual Report soon will be published on the ASA website. The report highlights noteworthy activities and achievements during the year that marked the 50th Anniversary of the ASA's founding, March 22-24, 1957, at the Roosevelt Hotel in New York City. In particular, I am thrilled to share the news about the ASA's very positive financial performance in 2007. As many of you will recall, when I became Executive Director in March 2003, the ASA faced considerable financial challenges, with severe structural budget shortages coupled with largely stagnant endowment investments. Since then, the ASA Board, the Secretariat, and the Ad hoc Strategic Planning Committee have worked hard to implement increasingly strategic fiscal measures and to make the tough decisions about dues and fees that resulted in a balanced budget in 2007 and in 2008. We have been mindful of the impact that these measures have had on the ASA membership, and we very much appreciate your continued support, as expressed by the growing number of lifetime members and sustained contributions to the Association's endowment and to the "\$50 for the 50th" campaign.

Other initiatives include further updates to the ASA Bylaws, a process that the ASA Board is undertaking in conjunction with the Ad hoc Strategic Planning Committee. The updates will be proposed for adoption by referendum and ASA members will receive an electronic alert about these new developments.

In addition, the Program Committee has nearly completed its work for the 50th anniversary of the first ASA Annual Meeting, "Knowledge of Africa: The Next Fifty Years," which will be held in Chicago, November 13-16, at the Sheraton Chicago Hotel and Towers. We're pleased to return to the Chicago area in a larger venue, having outgrown the site of the inaugural Annual Meeting, which took place September 8-10, 1958, in Evanston, IL. The Local Arrangements Committee is hard at work fundraising and planning events, having secured from Mayor Daley a Proclamation declaring November 9 to 16 "African Week in Chicago." On behalf of the Board of Directors I offer my sincere thanks to Patrick Manning, Program Chair, and the Program Committee, and to Fassil Demisse and Lynette Jackson, Local Arrangements Committee Co-Chairs and the Local Arrangements Committee for their leadership in organizing and planning what promises to be a wonderfully celebratory occasion of fifty years of annual meetings this fall. Please look for details

in the Preliminary Program, which will be posted to the ASA website in July. Invite your colleagues and students, and make your arrangements to participate in this celebratory event!

We are pleased to invite ASA members to share their professional news with the ASA community through a new "Member News" feature that will begin with the next edition of the *ASA News*. Please see page 4 for further information. Guidelines also have been developed to enhance the vitality of the Coordinate Organization Corner. We look forward to having Coordinate Organization officers use this section for announcements of interest to their Africanist constituencies. Coordinate Organization officers are also invited to meet with Board members and other Coordinate Organization officers to share ideas and to discuss future collaboration on Sunday, November 16, during the Annual Meeting. The exact time and the venue for the meeting will be provided in the Preliminary Program.

Many of you may recall that the ASA inaugurated "ASA Online" with basic membership services in 2004, adding an online capacity for submitting and reviewing Annual Meeting proposals in 2005, online voting in 2006, and an online member directory in 2007. As some of you may have experienced, the functionality of the system has reached the limits of its potential. To be more responsive to the evolving needs of the ASA membership, the Secretariat has been hard at work to put in place a better integrated system that takes advantage of significant advances in web-based technology. The new system will enhance the ASA membership experience and facilitate greater information-sharing throughout the wider Africanist community, providing an unprecedented opportunity for the targeted access to Africa-related expertise and to the networks that form the bedrock of the ASA's mission to promote African studies. The planned launch date is January 1, 2009. Stay tuned for updates.

To plan for ongoing operations and technological advances and to undertake new initiatives, the ASA counts on membership dues, Annual Meeting fees, publication sales, and the generosity of its members. Last year marked the 50th Anniversary of the ASA's founding. This year marks the 50th Anniversary of the first Annual Meeting. Your contribution to the 50 Year Anniversaries Campaign will help us to commemorate these doubly important milestones. We depend on your support to advance the ASA's mission. I urge you to visit www.africanstudies.org with the knowledge that every contribution is important and every donation counts. With your help, we can "double the 50s." Give \$100 or give more generously. Most importantly, give what you can so that together, we can consolidate our gains and secure a future for the next fifty years and beyond. In Chicago, let's celebrate "50 Years - 100% Participation!"