

## LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The year past has been marked by milestones, achieved within the context of a national US election year with path breaking nominees, and an economic downturn that deepened to profound international proportions. Chicago, still vibrant with hope because resident Barack Obama will become America's next president, was a welcoming venue for the ASA's second 50th celebration: the 50th anniversary of the first Annual Meeting. It was a pleasure to work with the Program Chair Patrick Manning and Local Arrangements Co-Chairs Fassil Demissie and Lynette Jackson and their Committees. Their enthusiastic dedication for advancing and enhancing the program theme, "Knowledge of Africa: The Next Fifty Years," culminated in wonderful success. Their exceptional efforts, along with the contributions of ASA members who volunteer their service on award and prize committees, as journal editors, and on the nominating and election committees, is key to the Association's ability to recognize excellence in the field, to disseminate knowledge through outreach and publications, and, through the Annual Meeting, to provide a face-to-face venue for bringing together people with a scholarly and professional interest in Africa.

The inaugural Annual Report, which is posted on the ASA website, summarizes some of the highlights of calendar year 2007. The report hints at opportunities for greater engagement with Africa. The ASA is in an increasingly advantageous position to leverage its greatest resource – its members – to transform these opportunities into reality. As reported during the Business Meeting, the ASA achieved a surplus in 2007. This surplus has enabled the Association to invest in developing a more robust website that will facilitate greater transparency, allowing Board decisions to be disseminated more readily. The new website will also foster greater participation, for example, through online communities

organized by the Association's coordinate organizations. The launch is scheduled for early January. Watch [www.africanstudies.org](http://www.africanstudies.org) for the exciting details.

The triumphs of 2008 would not have been possible without the deep partnership between the ASA community and the Board's elected and appointed leadership and the tireless efforts of the ASA Secretariat staff to implement Board policy and to manage the Association's many relationships and activities. Significantly, the Association's financial health continues to be carefully monitored and the Board voted a 2009 budget that was balanced without investment income - a remarkable feat in this volatile economy that was accomplished by making difficult decisions to stay within the ASA's means, i.e., by controlling AV expenses at the Annual Meeting. Coupled with this good news is that the ASA remains certified for participation in the Combined Federal Campaign through the Aid for Africa Federation, and the 50 Year Anniversaries Fundraising Campaign, set to end on December 31, has received nearly \$100,000 in contributions. Even better news, however, would be that the Association could restore programs that have been reduced due to financial realities, such as the International Visitor Award, and fund new activities, for example, through the Memorandum of Understanding that has just been signed with the Association of African Universities. Once the 50 Years Campaign has ended, the general endowment will be an increasingly important vehicle for ensuring that the Association will have the resources that it needs to enhance information exchange about Africa and to provide key support services to the Africanist community.

The future depends on the resolve of each one of us to make the ASA a priority for giving. We are counting on your continued support. Let's face 2009 with a strengthened commitment to the ASA's mission of promoting African Studies!