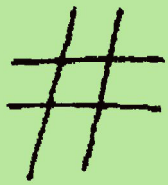


# ISSUE



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# ISSUE

## A Quarterly Journal of Africanist Opinion

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*The following members of the Committee on Current Issues have individually agreed to serve as Editorial Advisers:*

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<b>Mlaheni Njisane</b>	<b>Richard Sklar</b>
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The first pages of this *Issue* include statements made during the 1971 Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association at sessions organized by the Committee on Current Issues. The chairman, Richard Sklar (UCLA), spoke on November 4 summarizing the Committee's deliberations and outlining new efforts to make information about southern Africa accessible to large numbers of interested people.

At the initial plenary session on Wednesday evening, Robert Good, Elizabeth Landis and John Marcum discussed American foreign policy in Rhodesia, Namibia, and Portuguese Africa. Their papers have been published in *Africa Today* (Vol. 18, No. 4 October 1971). Introductory remarks by Mrs. Goler Butcher, staff consultant to the House Subcommittee on Africa, are reprinted here, along with comments by discussants C. Sylvester Whitaker (Princeton University) and David Chanaiwa (San Fernando Valley State College) who attempted to relate the findings of the panelists to the work of the Committee.

# THE COMMITTEE ON CURRENT ISSUES

## Remarks by Richard Sklar, Chairman

In March 1971 the Committee on Current Issues was established by the Board of Directors of the African Studies Association to deal with controversial issues of public policy which fall within the ambit of African studies. The Committee held its first meeting last May, and at that time it adopted a statement that was made public in the *African Studies Newsletter*. Briefly, the Committee decided that its purpose was to promote the public awareness and discussion of issues that involve the role and responsibilities of the U.S. in regard to Africa. In other words, we would like to bring scholarship in the U.S. more directly to bear upon the formation of public policies. We want to do this in a way that is consistent with the legal status of the Association as a scholarly membership organization.

At the May meeting, the Committee decided that its main subject or interest would be those issues that arise as a result of the racial, colonial and neo-colonial domination of African peoples. Immediately, these issues are concerned with conditions and American involvements in South Africa, in Namibia, in Rhodesia and in the Portuguese controlled territories — areas where, altogether, there are over 40 million Africans who are dominated by regimes that are based on a minority composed of a few million white people.

The Committee also concluded that in order to effectively carry out the mandate of the Board and the wishes of the membership, any such program would have to be long-term in scope. The purpose would be to help shape, through educational and appropriate informational means, public opinion and public policy in the United States. To this end, we organized yesterday's panel on the role and responsibilities of the United States in relation to Namibia, Rhodesia, and the Portuguese territories. The papers and proceedings will be published. At the next meeting of the Association in Philadelphia we would like to focus the attention of members on South Africa and U.S. involvements in South Africa itself. This will entail much planning and consideration if we are to have a more diversified program reflecting broader participation than we have been able to present at the current meeting. However, I should add

that I do not recall any meeting of the Association at which there has been a greater proportion of panels and scholarly activities devoted to the problems of international involvement and responsibilities in southern Africa.

In addition to the organization of panels, the Committee on Current Issues has decided upon a number of educational and information activities, two in particular. First, the Board has agreed with our proposal that there ought to be a program for the retrieval and republication of materials which involve relevant or current issues. These materials will be inexpensive and will be made available in bulk for classroom and other public uses. Also, the Committee hopes to establish a subcommittee which will take responsibility for informing members of the Association about upcoming governmental activities, hearings in Congress, at the UN and so forth: the sort of information that ought to be readily available to persons in the African studies field so that they can act before proposals such as the Byrd Amendment become law. Such debates and activities must be made known regularly and in due time to the members of our Association. The Board has agreed to cooperate with the Committee on Current Issues in establishing a mechanism for transmitting such information. In this way we may begin to affect decisions at the Congressional level. The involvement of a few Africanists in executive branch deliberations in the past has not brought about the kind of governmental policies concerning Africa that an informed public would demand.

In the last analysis, the contributions that we as members of the African Studies Association make to the shaping of opinion in the United States and to the formulation of policy will be made fundamentally in connection with our teaching and research. We know that research, like teaching, is a very individual activity. No one can really do it through an organization, and no one can do it for you, and if you do it the consequences are unpredictable. The Committee urges upon the membership the urgent necessity of undertaking research that has to do with the racial, colonial and new-colonial domination of African people, especially insofar as the United States is concerned.