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FOR AFRICAN STUDIES
ASSOCIATION MEMBERS

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FROM THE SECRETARIAT...

The month of April marks the end of my term as Executive Director of the ASA. These seven years have been marked by harder work than I ever imagined, coupled with a good deal of satisfaction as individual ASA members have expressed their appreciation for my efforts. I am particularly appreciative of the support and encouragement given by colleagues and administrators at Emory University over the years.

There are three important changes in the ASA that I have been proud to be part of during these years. The first is the ASA's growth. Our individual memberships have nearly doubled in the period since 1988, reflecting in my view both the continuing strength of African studies in the academy and the growing interest in African affairs by the current generation of students.

The second change is the ASA's movement from self-imposed organizational isolation to increasing participation in educational and policy communities nationally and internationally. We now articulate our concerns as educators on a national level through membership in organizations with common interests, such as the American Council of Learned Societies and the National Humanities Alliance. We have also moved, albeit gingerly and with an eye to our tax-exempt status, towards more direct interaction with organizations involved in African policy formation and implementation.

Finally, we have taken steps to regularize and professionalize the management of our association. We are now less dependent on the good will, volunteer efforts and institutional resources of our members associated with major area studies programs. We are also well on our way to building a modest endowment to support special projects.

Despite the positive changes in the ASA, I remain troubled by a trend that threatens conflict between African and other members of the Association. Nominations for ASA leadership positions are characterized by a form of institutional elitism. There is, first, disproportionate weight enjoyed by institutions with federal funding for African studies. Beyond that, the ASA's leaders tend to be drawn from other elite institutions, thus effectively excluding the talents of large numbers of members, many of whom are African, whose training and earlier employment outside the US have kept them from having access to appointments in more prestigious institutions. Africans now make up nearly 20 percent of all US-based ASA members, yet their numbers in leadership roles are disproportionately low. The tensions caused by this situation have begun to emerge. My parting wish for the ASA is that the current leadership address this problem in a forthright, direct and open manner.

I look forward to continuing to be part of the intellectual side of ASA life in my capacity as an Emory faculty member.

Edna G. Bay