

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Colleagues,

These are both exciting times and challenging times for African studies, indeed for the United States and Africa. Much of the excitement centers on the inauguration of President Barack Obama as the first African American President of the United States. The son of a foreign student from Kenya, he symbolizes the complex connections between the historic and new African diasporas in the United States as well as the ties that bind the US and Africa. These ties have not always been beneficial for Africa, and it is perhaps still too early to tell whether US-Africa relations are going to change in fundamental ways under the new Obama Administration.

But these are also difficult economic times. The financial crisis that started on Wall Street has grown into a full-blown recession, which affects all major sectors including educational institutions and all world regions including Africa. Moments of crisis offer both danger and opportunity, the danger of wittingly or unwittingly undermining institutional and intellectual assets built over decades and the opportunity to re-examine priorities, reaffirm commitments, and re-imagine the future. In our case, the importance of creating and disseminating informed knowledges on, from, and for Africa remain as crucial as ever. The Association's dedication to promoting African studies should be as robust as ever.

There are indeed exciting possibilities on the horizon with the emergence of the new administration. The ASA should be in a position to rely on its strengths to make a difference. In fact, it ought to redouble its efforts to promote informed public discourse and policy making on African matters on which we spend our time studying, researching, writing, and propagating. This is also a moment that offers incredible opportunities to foster the integration of diaspora studies and African studies, a process that has accelerated in recent years institutionally and intellectually; institutionally with the growth of Africana studies departments or centers at many universities and colleges that combine African and African American studies; and intellectually with the proliferation of studies that examine the experiences of African peoples on both sides of the Atlantic.

As an Association we can only be as strong as our individual and collective participation in the Association's activities are strong. I would therefore encourage you to join or renew your membership, to participate in the forthcoming annual meeting in November in New Orleans. I would also urge you to strengthen the Association by supporting the endowment so that the ASA will continue to advance its mission of promoting African studies, especially during the economic downturn that is affecting us all.

I believe that the investments we make now in the ASA in terms of active participation and donating our own resources, taking advantage of this historic moment in American history symbolized by the election and inauguration of President Obama, will yield immense dividends for our community of scholars and advocates for Africa when the difficult economic times come to an end. Now more than ever we have to be part of the forces that influence the development of deeper understanding of Africa and mutually beneficial relations between the United States and Africa.

Paul Tiyambe Zeleza
President