Association for Africanist Anthropology
2009 Annual Report

Submitted by Bennetta Jules-Rosette, (Outgoing AfAA President, 2009)

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Membership and Annual Resources (Prompts 1.1-1.2)

The Association for Africanist Anthropology (AfAA) is unique as the only section of the American Anthropological Association to focus primarily on the cultures and social issues of continental Africa. This annual section report follows the prompts established by the American Anthropological Association. The year of 2009 marks a positive transitional period for the AfAA. Over the past two years, our section has grown considerably, reaching a membership of 348, with 109 graduate student members by the end of November of 2009. Our revenues and assets continue to be strong, with a total of $34,438.91 in net assets at the end of November, 2009, a small increase over our net assets of $33,177.16 at the beginning of the year. This figure, however, represents a decline from $41,010.54 in net assets as of the fall of 2008. Although our membership has remained solid and consistent, netting us $4,753.81 this year, our expenditures have increased due to three new book and paper awards and several outreach innovations that are in progress.

AfAA Awards (Prompt 1.7)

Over the past two years, one of our section’s most important innovations has been the launching of three new awards: the Elliott P. Skinner Book Award, a Graduate Student Paper Award, and an Undergraduate Paper Prize. These awards were first presented at the 2008 meetings in San Francisco and again at the 2009 meetings in Philadelphia. In addition, we have continued the AfAA tradition of inviting a senior distinguished scholar to present a lecture each year. The Distinguished Lecture includes a stipend of $500 for outstanding scholarship.

The Elliott P. Skinner Book Award for originality in scholarship, innovation in research, and visibility in the field of African anthropological studies was initially set at $1,000. This
year’s award winner was Ben W. Jones (University of East Anglia) for his path-breaking book *Beyond the State in Rural Uganda* (University of Edinburgh Press, 2009). This book applied a novel, community-centered approach to the study of nongovernmental agencies and local self-help efforts in rural Uganda, with a focus on in-depth ethnography and activist advocacy for change. After extensive discussion within the book award committee, no honorable mentions were granted for the award in 2009. The issue of honorable mentions for future awards, however, still remains open to further AfAA Board discussion. There appears to have been some confusion in the announcement of the honorable mentions this year. Any confusion in this process was inadvertent, and the AfAA apologizes for complications that may have resulted from the timing of our book award deliberations and periodic listings. In the light of ongoing budgetary projections, through a Board consensus reached at our December 4 meeting, the AfAA also proposed to raise funds for a book award endowment and, in the interim, to reduce the book award to $750. Further discussion of these plans will continue at the 2010 Board meeting.

Betty Harris (University of Oklahoma) chaired the 2009 book award committee, with the participation of Gwendolyn Mikell (Georgetown University) and Bennetta Jules-Rosette (University of California, San Diego). At both our 2008 and 2009 Board meetings, the addition of two more members to the book award committee was discussed. It is expected that the new AfAA president, Maria Cattell, will join this committee as an *ex officio* member. The committee’s June 1 deadline for the receipt of books also needs to be more strictly observed in the future.

Karen Tranberg Hansen (Northwestern University) presented the 2009 Distinguished Lecture, entitled “Chiluba’s Trunks: Consumption, Excess, and the Dramaturgy of Power in Zambia.” This lecture was a provocative and visually compelling presentation on how consumer excess shaped charismatic authority and the perils and pitfalls of power in Zambia. Professor Hansen also served as a mentor of our graduate student award winner, Lauren Adrover, who received a prize for her paper entitled “Festive Currencies of Value: Culture, Commodification, and Performative Action in Ghana.” Scott Matter of McGill University received an honorable mention for his graduate paper, “Neopatrimonialism, Land Tenure Transformation, and Violence at Enoosupukia, Kenya.” The Undergraduate Paper Prize was presented to Josephine Pang (University of California, San Diego) for “A Gendered Critique of Social/Sexual Networks: The Case of HIV/AIDS in South Africa and Uganda.” Bennetta Jules-Rosette was one of Josephine Pang’s mentors. David Turkon chaired the Graduate Award Committee and worked with Robert Gordon on the selection of the winners. J.R. Osborn chaired the Undergraduate Paper Award Committee, originally sharing these responsibilities with the late Nancy Schwartz, whose passing on April 24, 2009 is deeply mourned by our Board.

**Mentorship Efforts (Prompt 1.5)**

AfAA’s mentorship activities are strongly articulated with our awards. Section officers are encouraged to search for potential graduate and undergraduate student awardees. In order to receive an award, graduate students must also join the AfAA and submit their work for presentation at an annual meeting. The three student awardees were mentored by AfAA members, who helped them with the preparation and submission of their work. The AfAA
considers this type of mentoring crucial, not only to building the section’s membership, but also to developing the next generation of Africanist anthropologists. Another aspect of mentoring involves the graduate student representative’s position. The graduate student representative is a full member of the AfAA Board. This year, Erica Fontana (University of California, San Diego) assumed her responsibilities as graduate representative by co-presenting a research paper, networking with other students at the 2009 meetings, attending the Board breakfast and business meeting, and helping with the AfAA membership booth. This type of practical internship is invaluable to the sections and the AfAA, as well as to the students themselves.

AfAA Invited Sessions Co-Sponsored Panels, and Special Events (Prompts 1.3 and 1.6)

At the 2009 meetings in Philadelphia, the AfAA sponsored four invited sessions: (1) China in Africa/Africa in China (Session 1-047A), with the Society for East Asian Anthropology; (2) Pentecostalism and Public Health in Southern Africa: Neocolonial Control or Postcolonial Imperative in the Context of HIV/AIDS (Session 2-128), with the Society for Medical Anthropology; (3) Theorizing Infrastructure: Technopolitics of Development in Contemporary Africa (Session 2-145), with the Association for Political and Legal Anthropology; and (4) The Effects of a Paradigm in Health Advocacy: Female Genital Cutting as a Human Rights Violation (Session 1-017A), with the Society for Medical Anthropology. Although co-sponsorship of the latter session (1-017A) was agreed upon, the AfAA participation inadvertently was not printed in the final program. In addition to these four invited sessions, the AfAA reviewed and organized eleven regular panels, including among the highlights: Conceptions and Configurations of Identities within Tanzanian Landscapes (Session 0-010); Africa on the Move: Immigrants at Home and in the Diaspora (Session 1-001); Intimate Transfigurations: Masculinities in Africa’s “Global” Cities (Session 1-049A); Africa Remixed: Youth in Africa and the African Diaspora (Session 2-114); Meddling with Africa: Development, Interventions, and NGOS (Session 3-157A); and Maasai Common(s) Sense: The Political Logic of Enclosure (Session 4-071). Our Program Committee, chaired by David Turkon, worked effectively. AfAA members, including graduate students, also participated in a broad cross section of panels throughout the meetings. Spring meetings are not applicable to our section (Prompt 1.4).

Status and Use of AfAA Section Communications and Publicity (Prompt 1.8)

The AfAA reception serves as one of our primary vehicles for outreach. This year’s very successful reception had a record number of attendees, requiring us to change our venue to accommodate them. Including refreshments and musical entertainment by Afro-Latin percussionist Gene Perry, the reception was immediately followed by our Distinguished Lecture and business meeting. For the past two years, the reception and business meeting have been scheduled in coordination with our Board breakfast, allowing for preplanning and streamlining of the business meeting.

Our website was reconfigured in 2007 by J.R. Osborn, now at the American University of Dubai. He has agreed to continue his work on the website during the upcoming year, and he awaits further Board recommendations. The website includes our Bylaws, updated information on the association officers, and news about current events and section plans. The
AfAA website is coordinated with the AAA list serve and allows us to update the general membership on a regular basis.

Jennifer Coffman remains AfAA’s Contributing Editor for the Anthropology News. She does an excellent job of submitting timely columns to the AN. She recruits submissions from members, writes the column, and distributes it to the Board for review before submitting the final column to AN Editor, Dinah Winnick. The rapid timing of these columns is often challenging, but the AfAA Board has consistently risen to the occasion. The two International Liaisons have been particularly helpful in providing news and information from our members abroad.

In terms of publicity, we also developed new t-shirts reading “Africa with an Attitude!: Putting Africa Back on the Map.” These t-shirts were sold at the AfAA booth with complimentary wrist bands remaining from 2007 and 2008. We also used the sales as an occasion to distribute AfAA award information and to recruit new members.

Future Plans and Programmatic Suggestions (Prompts 1.9 and 2.1-2.4)

At the AfAA Board breakfast on December 4, the Executive Committee discussed the possibilities for future collaborations with other AAA sections and with external organizations. Establishing a collaboration with the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES) was discussed at length, with the hope that the AfAA could project formal participation in their 2012 meeting in Manchester, England. The Board also wishes to retain the annual breakfast and the popular reception, but it will seek ways of attempting to keep the reception budget within a consistent and reasonable framework. An endowment for the Elliott P. Skinner Book Award will also be useful to our budget in the future. We will continue with our promotional activities at the AfAA booth next year. An increase in dues from $20 to $25, which the AfAA has not implemented in many years, was approved at the Board breakfast and will be put in place for 2010. There was also further discussion of providing stipends for scholars from Africa to attend the AAA meetings, but the mechanisms for obtaining these resources are still under discussion.

Conclusions (Prompts 3.1-3.3)

On the whole, the AfAA is robust and is moving in a positive direction. The AfAA Board is grateful to the AAA staff, in particular Section Liaison Kim Baker, Sheron Davis, Carla Fernandez, Lucille Horn, Suzanne Mattingly, Richard Thomas, and Dinah Winnick for ongoing support. We have voted to give 1% of our current funding balance as a contribution toward a cost of living pool for staff salaries. Incoming President Maria Cattell is overseeing the implementation of this measure. We are also concerned about the overlap in schedule of the AAA meetings and the meetings of the African Studies Association (ASA) in 2010, 2011, and 2013. We currently hope that the Executive Board and the Section Assembly of the AAA will address this problem in the future. The AfAA is enthusiastic about its new programs and awards, and we hope to have the maximum number of Africanists in attendance at our sessions. We look forward to another productive year of work and intellectual collaboration within the American Anthropological Association.

Respectfully submitted,
Bennetta Jules-Rosette
Outgoing President, AfAA (2009)