AFRICAN STUDIES BULLETIN

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AN EDITORIAL NOTE

This is the last issue of the AFRICAN STUDIES BULLETIN which I shall be editing. As announced at the 1964 annual meeting and recorded in more detail elsewhere in this issue, the BULLETIN will henceforth be edited by David Brokensha and Peter Duignan, and will be produced on the west coast.

I have edited the BULLETIN since 1958, and it has been fun to do. Apologies for delays and problems of detail have had to be made often to the ASA membership; pursuing people to Africa or extracting an article even from New York has not always been easy, and the BULLETIN has often had to await the completion of other academic tasks. My thanks are due to many members of the Association for assistance, information and patience. Looking back, one finds some surprising information in BULLETIN issues; looking forward, I hope that the new editors will find sources of greater imagination and ideas.

It seems appropriate to utilize this issue to present some serious ideas and concerns. Over the last year I have grown increasingly disturbed about developments in Africa and in this country, as I am sure many Africanists have. The course of events in the Congo and elsewhere has led to a deterioration in African-American relations which is assuming major proportions. Apart from strictly diplomatic issues, existing frictions seem to derive from serious basic misunderstandings about each other, our values and priorities, and the ways in which we try to carry them out. We reach the point where in Africa Americans become the epitome of machinating, evil capitalism or racialism, ready to overthrow African governments or deny to the individual African his legitimate aspirations. In the United States, we return to the bad old days in which the newspapers print stories of African barbarism and revive all the cliches of cannibalism and darkest Africa.

By definition, this Association is a group of Americans who are interested in Africa and who have worked there--and most whom have come to honor and to love the particular part of Africa which they know best. This Association is also an academic one which is devoted to the discovery of truth. We are, indeed, precisely in the position of interpreters who can help to explain America to Africa, and Africa to Americans. Most of us do the first whenever we are in Africa; I urge that we do, here, more of the second.

Without arguing in detail all the pros and cons of the ASA becoming an operating organization, it seems to me that there are a number of activities which we should consider. Many of us are teachers, concerned with adding courses on Africa to college curricula. Could we as an Association go further in aiding other teachers to incorporate African materials into their teaching? The summer institutes described in this issue are a start. But in the seven

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years of the ASA's existence we have really not done very much in this direction.

American press coverage on African affairs is appalling. We have considered helping African journalists; how about American ones? A training program for American correspondents assigned to Africa, perhaps in association with a group such as the Niemann Foundation, might produce more understanding and realistic coverage of African happenings. Can we not, also, urge individual newspapers and press services to improve their coverage, and protest when they produce serious inaccuracies or biased news stories? The Executive Board of the Association might play a very useful role in drawing to editors' attention the major omissions and the major inaccuracies of their treatment of Africa. Most of them, unfortunately, have simply no idea when they have gone wrong.

Cannot the Association play a larger role in working with African governmental representatives in this country, or with African students? Can it be more active in combatting racial attitudes, or the sort of terminology which uses "white" as a synonym for European or American, and an antithesis to everything African? Would it be possible to the Association to enter other areas of public relations on African affairs? For instance, could we create a speakers' bureau on Africa, or establish African travel and exchange programs for university students and other groups such as businessmen, labor leaders, and women's clubs? Can we not create better liaison with the Department of State and officials of the Johnson administration at all levels, to ensure that African attitudes and opinions are at least taken into consideration in the formulation of American foreign policy?

Many of these suggestions can be made to the individual Africanist as well as to the Association. And we all have other activities which we might increase: teaching and speaking in our own communities; working with the training programs of the Peace Corps and other organizations in Africa; advising our local libraries on current materials on Africa; working with African students and study groups; taking steps to combat local lack of newspaper coverage, use of racial terminology, and the cliches about "darkest Africa" which are still so widespread.

In other words, I am urging on both the African Studies Association and on individual Africanists a more activist role in African affairs. We have our own specializations and our own research, but I would suggest that our responsibilities go further than this. In leaving the editorship of this BULLETIN I hope to be able to spend more time working to increase African-American understanding, and I strongly urge other Africanists to join me.

Margaret L. Bates

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