

Towards A Renaissance in Scholarship, Policies and Development in the African World: A Brief History of the African Heritage Studies Association

The African Heritage Studies Association (AHSA) was founded in 1969 for the purpose of providing a forum for scholars of African descent to exchange information and ideas about the history and culture of African peoples both on the continent and in the diaspora.

As an incorporated association of scholars, AHSA was empowered to engage in research education, preservation, interpretation and presentations on the historical and cultural heritage of African peoples at all levels and in all fields that may assist in better understanding and contributing to the development of the African world. The primary objectives of AHSA are: a) organizing conferences, seminars and workshops for exchanging ideas and strategies that promote African-centered history and cultural studies; b) establishing linkages and mutually beneficial collaborations between AHSA and interested scholars and associations in Africa and the diaspora; and c) encouraging, teaching and supporting students interested in studying the history and culture of African peoples.

AHSA has experienced three developmental phases since its inception and is currently undergoing a fourth. Phase 1 was a Protest Phase during which Black scholars expressed concern and protested years of marginalization in the field of African Studies. The two seminal protest activities were: a) calling for structural and operational reform of the African Studies Association (ASA), the sole arbiter of African Studies in the USA, during the 1968 Annual ASA Conference in Los Angeles, and, after concluding that the association was not inclined to address their views and concerns, b) occupying plenary sessions at the 1969 Annual ASA Conference in Montreal.

Phase 2 was devoted to the establishment of a viable disciplinary association. It began with the incorporation of the African Heritage Studies Association (AHSA) in 1969 to serve as a forum for exchanging African-centered theories and research on African history, culture and development. During this Phase, AHSA engaged in research, scholarship, and action that challenged conventional views of Africa and interrogated the ahistorical idea of an underdeveloped, dependent, resource rich continent in perpetual need of Western aid and tutelage. Additionally, the association inaugurated its 1st Annual Conference at Howard University in 1970. This well-attended conference featured major national and international scholar-activists from Africa and the Diaspora that discussed groundbreaking research on African history and culture.

The 2nd Annual Conference was held at Southern University in 1971 and during the next decade, outstanding conferences were held at universities in New York, Atlanta, Baltimore and other major cities across the nation. One of the highlights of Phase 2 was AHSA's participation in the 1973-74 meeting of the International Association of Africanists in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Both AHSA and ASA delegation were present at the meeting and since only one American delegation could be seated, a compromise between the two associations made John Henrik Clarke, AHSA's founding president, head of the American delegation. This was a watershed moment for AHSA, one that was further enhanced by a special audience with Emperor Haile Selassie. Also during this phase, AHSA organized a pilgrimage to Africa, with Ghana as the major site for very effective and productive collaborative community forums.

Phase 3 of AHSA's history began around 1980 with Annual Conferences enhanced by collaborations with other disciplinary, cultural and grassroots organizations. During this Phase, publications and national and international speaking engagements for AHSA members grew along with the proliferation of Black Studies, Africana Studies and Africana Women's Studies programs. AHSA also held joint conferences with the National Conference of Black Political Scientists (NCOBPS) and the Black Studies Association, while at the same time working closely with pre-collegiate school systems in New York and Atlanta to include African history in the curriculum, and engaging in groundbreaking research. It was in this period that phase that AHSA was able to consolidate its role as a leader in reconstructive approaches to teaching and research on African history, and as a promoter and supporter of young Black scholars committed to research on Africa and the diaspora.

After four decades of extraordinary scholar-activism, AHSA began to systematically assess its accomplishments, explore lessons learned and best options for continued success in the 21st Century. This critical assessment and planning process is an AHSA Renewal Phase. While continuing to document and explicate the global context in which the simultaneous forces of racial slavery, colonialism and imperialism emerged, converged, pillaged the African world and interrupted its development, the association is examining the impact of historical forces that still resonate in the global order and continue to divide, destabilize, exploit and shape relations between Africa and the rest of the world.

Igniting a renaissance in scholarship, policies and development in the African World is AHSA's 21st Century goal. Operationally, the association is committed to a Five Year Renewal Series of Conferences designed to a) systematically explore, document and assess AHSA's journey, and b) develop an Action Plan for the future. The Series begins with the 2014 Annual Conference in Atlanta, which celebrates 45 years of AHSA history. It culminates with AHSA's Golden Anniversary Celebration in 2019, which consists of major symposiums in five African countries (East, West, Central, Southern and North Africa), highlighted by the unveiling of its 21st Century Action Plan.

AHSA Conference Series, 2014-2019

46th October 29-31, 2015

Scholar-Activism in Africa and the Diaspora
Collaboration with the Ronald Walter's Leadership and Public Policy Center
Washington, D.C.

47th October 27-29, 2016

The Academic and Cultural Impact of Africana and Black Studies
Teaching, Research, Publication and Dissemination of Information
New York, New York

48th October 26-28, 2017

The Leadership Concept in the African World
Comparative Studies of Leadership Styles and Effectiveness
Los Angeles, California

49th October 25-27, 2018

Expanding AHSA's Global Outreach
Education, Communication, Activism, Cultural and Economic Partnerships
Atlanta, Georgia

50th October 2019

Celebrating AHSA's Golden Anniversary
Towards an African Renaissance: African and Diaspora Collaborations
A Symposium Series in East, West, Central North & Southern Africa

AHSA: www.africanheritagestudies.org