In December of 2007, President-Elect Setha Low (now outgoing President) contacted us to think about leading the Program Committee for the 2009 AAA meetings. She asked whether we thought we could play a leadership role in bringing perspectives that are sometimes marginalized – those of younger anthropologists, and of anthropologists of color – more toward the center of the meetings. She also asked how what kinds of things we might say about anthropology’s role in the world today, a question that has only become more critical with the election of Barack Obama to the Presidency of the United States, himself the son of an anthropologist. We accepted Setha’s challenge, and began thinking of a theme that would address the following questions:

What is the relevance of anthropology in today’s world? Where does our discipline stand in the age of hyper-science and the genome; during an era in which ethnography – as a method and form of textured representation – is being mobilized with vigor and confidence by those working in other disciplinary formations; at a moment when the questions we’re asking are also being answered by others in the humanities, social sciences, and media (and often with much more popular recognition)? Does anthropology still provide a unique contribution? What are its contemporary goals, and are they different from those of previous intellectual generations?

In consultation with members of the Executive Program Committee, we wrote the thematic statement that would guide panel, paper, and poster submissions for 2009. In our January column for Anthropology News, we stated that the theme – “The End/s of Anthropology” – was designed to push us to use both meanings of the term “end” (conclusions and purposes) “in order to focus attention on anthropology’s changing relationships to other disciplines and to a variety of publics.” We felt that a public and collective set of conversations about our subjects, objects, and projects might allow us to find new sources of energy for anthropological work. We encouraged people to think about three sub-themes, which we list below:

1) **The end/s of relativism?** While cultural relativism has been one of anthropology’s foundational tenets, it has been under direct attack because the rhetorics and realities of global terrorism over-determine public discourse today. How have anthropologists balanced their investments in relativism with their understandings of their roles as cultural critics, and how might we continue to redefine (and defend) the basic truths of cultural relativism in such a hostile political environment?

2) **The end/s of identity?** Contemporary anthropologists have been pioneers of scholarly analyses about how identities are forged and politicized, and have been
particularly vocal in demonstrating how cultural identifications pass themselves off as natural. However, in decrying the essentialisms mobilized by previous generations of social scientists, we still struggle to make sense of the complex relationships between identity and power. For example, deconstructing racial identity has been a necessary project, but is it sufficient in our quest to challenge people’s robust investments in racial and racist ideologies? Is denaturalization enough to challenge the continued deployment of identity categories as mechanisms of social control?

3) **The end/s of publics?** While it has become commonplace to link the concerns of particular localities to national, regional, and global dimensions of practice and analysis, we still often struggle methodologically to conduct ethnography in today’s world. How must we re-think notions of space and time in relation to the new kinds of publics we analyze and engage today, whether these publics are migrant communities, diasporic communities, transnational religious communities, scientific communities, etc.? How do we conceptualize the explosion of mass mediated intimacies, and what can this tell us about new forms of social and economic engagement? What kinds of publics might we seek to address (or even produce) with our work, and how do we push the field’s epistemological and presentational conventions in order to effectively do so?

We felt that these rubrics would allow anthropologists working in diverse settings to find expansive spaces within which to assess the relevance of our field in today’s world. We also hoped that they would capture the imaginations of anthropologists doing work in unconventional ways, and would help them to find more space at the center of the discipline.

We had over 45 submissions for Executive and Presidential panels, and our Program Committee worked hard to choose the 28 that ultimately made it onto the program. These include undergraduate poster sessions; graduate sessions that feature a new way of presenting work called “Pecha Kucha,” borrowed from the fields of architecture and visual art; a roundtable discussion of the work of Stanley Ann Dunham, the President’s mother; an innovative performance/panel in honor of Katherine Dunham; a session that will now also serve as a memorial in honor of Claude Lévi-Strauss; a session investigating the legacy of Darwin; and a number of important thematic sessions addressing issues such as militarism, citizenship, heritage studies, language policy, genomics, indigenous knowledge, queer studies, and race. Several panels also explicitly address issues related to methodology and writing.

We also organized a number of special events to complement the regular program, and attempted to integrate other events into our own. For example, a photo exhibit and multi-media installation designed by Philippe Bourgois and Jeff Schonberg, authors of the recently published *Righteous Dopefiend: An Ethnographic Representation of Homelessness, Addiction and Poverty in Urban America* (UC Press), were opened to AAA members. Additionally, we sponsored the performance of *Pouring Tea: Black Gay Men of the South Tell Their Tales*, an adaptation of *Sweet Tea: An Oral History of*...
Black Gay Men of the South by E. Patrick Johnson, an ethnographer and performance studies scholar based at Northwestern University. Finally, we co-sponsored, with Duke University Press, a reception and book launch in honor of Stanley Ann Dunham’s Surviving against the Odds: Village Industry in Indonesia, her previously unpublished dissertation research at the University of Hawaii. Our Anthropology News columns in May, September, and November documented some of these events (February’s column was dedicated to introducing the Executive Program Committee, which included members across the four subfields, as well as anthropologists not currently working within the academy).

In all, we received 3,596 paper submissions for the Philadelphia meetings, in comparison with 4,178 for last year’s San Francisco meetings. Three thousand four hundred and sixty-two papers were accepted, and of the 609 panel sessions submitted, we were able to schedule 561 of them. In scheduling sessions, as is the practice from year to year, we relied on the recommendations and rankings of the section program chairs, scheduling first all the Presidential Sessions, then the Invited Sessions for each section, then the sessions ranked “A,” then “B,” and on down the line. We scheduled all the panels ranked “A” or “B,” and were able to get through a few of those ranked “C” before we ran out of rooms. As usual, Lucille Horn and Carla Fernandez directed this process. We met at Penn in one of our classrooms and placed panels one by one on the large poster sheets Lucille and Carla sent in advance that listed the available days and rooms. By and large, this is a democratic process as we are not able to see the names of panelists or organizers on the index cards listing each session. However, this precaution against favoritism also makes it impossible to see overlaps in the schedule, and as happens every year, there were a number of people who ended up being “double-booked.” Because the membership does not know how this process works, we – as well as Lucille and Carle – fielded a number of annoyed (and sometimes irate) e-mails. Therefore, we STRONGLY recommend investing in a computerized scheduling system that would help avoid this type of issue. It is true that by “eyeballing” the poster sheets, we were able to catch and correct a number of thematic overlaps, but we were nevertheless unable to prevent personnel overlaps. We also received a few e-mails from members stating that they never got the e-mail letting them know whether their panel was accepted or not. We are unsure about how this happened, but hope it can be avoided in the future. All in all, Lucille and Carla were supportive experts in this process, and were able to accommodate last minute requests and maneuverings as well. Lucille, in particular, will be missed as she moves on to the greener pastures of retirement!

We have thoroughly enjoyed our roles as Program Chairs over the past two years, and enthusiastically pass it over to Monica Heller. We wish to thank Setha for entrusting us with this role, and of course our committee for their hard and willing work: Whitney Battle-Baptiste; Philippe Bourgois; Vanessa Fong; Jonathan Marks; Bob Preucel; Ana Ramos; Kim Simmons; David Sutton; Roxanne Varzi; and Diana Wells.