The AfAA had a highly successful year in 2008. Many of the plans and projects initiated over the previous two years came to fruition during 2008. We have maintained the membership drive and outreach activities started in 2007. Our membership as of June 2008 reached 341, making us among the larger small Sections of the AAA. Our membership increase was due not only to an updating of our membership list via Alice Horner, an independent consultant in 2007, but was also the result of spirited Section elections along with a strong focus on our Section reception and awards ceremony. Our revenue and assets continue to be strong, showing an increase from $37,258.13 at the beginning of 2008 to $41,010.54 in September.

AfAA Awards

Among our most important innovations in 2008 was the launching of three awards: the Elliot P. Skinner Book Award, a Graduate Student Paper Award, and an Undergraduate Paper Prize. At the 2007 AAA meetings in Washington, D.C., we formed committees for these awards and established the general guidelines for submissions due by May 30, 2008. Due to the fact that 2008 was our first year to have these awards in place, we ultimately extended the deadline for receipt and review of these submissions until June of 2008. We also plan to place a special announcement in the Spring Anthropology Newsletter concerning the upcoming awards for 2009. The Elliot P. Skinner Award for originality of scholarship and visibility of a book in the field of African Studies and Africanist Anthropology consists of $1,000. The 2008 book award was presented to Deborah James (London School of Economics and Political Science) for her book entitled Gaining Ground?: “Rights” and “Property” in South African Land Reform (Routledge, 2007). It was agreed that this book offered an excellent and provocative example of engaged anthropology under the apartheid and post-apartheid régimes in South Africa. An honorable mention was awarded to Sabine Jell-Bahlisen (Director of Ogbuide Films and Editor of Dialectical Anthropology) for The Water Goddess in Igbo Cosmology: Ogbuide of Oguta Lake (Africa World Press, 2008). This study of religion and cosmology was based on several years of extensive field research in southwestern Nigeria.

Betty Harris (Oklahoma University) chaired the book award committee with the participation of Gwendolyn Mikell (Georgetown University) and Bennetta Jules-Rosette
At the 2008 San Francisco meetings, the AfAA Board agreed that the book award committee would remain in place for a minimum of two years in order to preserve continuity. As per the suggestion of Book Award Committee Chair Betty Harris, we will also add two new members to the committee so that four scholars will review the 2009 award. In 2008, the committee received nine submissions. Its most difficult challenge was obtaining all of the books from the publishers in a timely fashion. At the 2008 Board Meeting, Betty Harris proposed improving the process of book distribution for the 2009 awards by asking publishers to send the books directly to committee members.

The graduate student paper award, consisting of $500, was presented to J.R. Osborn (American University of Dubai) for his paper entitled “Writing Culture with Arabic Letters: The School of Khartoum and Contemporary Calligraphic Art.” The outstanding undergraduate paper went to Natalie Spritzer (University of California, San Diego) for “Health Care for All,” which was based on Natalie’s original fieldwork in Ghana. An honorable mention was awarded to Ryan Hewey (Central Connecticut State University) for his paper entitled “Negrotown: An Archaeology of African Agency from Colonial Connecticut.” At AfAA’s 2008 Board breakfast, it was agreed that efforts to find awardees for the two student prizes need to be expanded and intensified through broader and more systematic contacts with AfAA members and their mentees and students. This year’s award nominations are due by June 1, 2009. Based on last year’s experience, this date change allows extra time for award submissions.

AfAA Invited Sessions and Distinguished Lectures

During 2008, the AfAA sponsored four invited paper sessions, as well as one roundtable session. David Turkon (Ithaca College) and Maria Cattell (AfAA’s new President-Elect) served as the program committee. Nancy P. Schwartz, the outgoing Treasurer, will serve on the Program Committee with David Turkon in 2009. AfAA’s invited sessions for 2008 included a panel entitled “HIV/AIDS: Underscoring Needs and Challenges to Collaboration” organized by Alexander Rodlach (Creighton University) and David Turkon. This panel covered critical issues in the areas of cultural and political responses to the AIDS pandemic with an emphasis on cases drawn from West Africa and southern Africa. Jennifer Coffman (James Madison University) organized an invited roundtable chaired by Mwenda Ntarangwi (Calvin College) on “Governing Kenya: Insights on Inclusion, Collaboration and Engagement from the 2007 Elections.” This pathbreaking roundtable session dealt with important issues of political transition in contemporary Kenya. Karen Tranberg Hansen (Northwestern University) and Soyini Madison (Northwestern University) organized a lively and engaging session on African dress and performance in relationship to social action and practices in a variety of African settings, including Congo (DRC), Ghana, Nigeria and Zambia. This panel is a prelude to a larger conference on African dress and fashion organized by AfAA member Karen Tranberg Hansen as part of the 60th anniversary
celebration at Northwestern University. A session on “Reconsidering Islam and Muslim Youth Culture” was organized by AfAA International Liaison Benjamin Soares (African Studies Centre, Leiden) and Marloes Janson (Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin). This panel analyzed contemporary Muslim youths’ turn to religion as projects of ethical self-fashioning and moral reform in the context of new modes of sociality and public life, productive activities, and patterns of consumption. Kristin Phillips (University of Wisconsin-Madison) and Erin Dean (New College of Florida) organized a session on “Political Parties and Subjectivity in Africa,” which considered the social life and cultural work of African political parties and their roles in statecraft, development and everyday life in African contexts. Other non-invited panels included a session on African art and museum culture in France organized by Bennetta Jules-Rosette and J.R. Osborn as well as the active participation of AfAA members in a large cross-section of panels in their areas of specialization. The AfAA Distinguished Lecture at the 2008 AAA meetings was a Presidential Address delivered by Bennetta Jules-Rosette on November 21. The lecture followed the AfAA reception, which had a record number of attendees reaching out into the hallway. Music was provided by Afro-Caribbean percussionist Gene Perry. AfAA utilizes this occasion as an important vehicle for outreach. Bennetta Jules-Rosette’s multimedia lecture and presentation entitled “Innovation and Agency: Structures for Change in Africa and the African Diaspora” covered major social problems confronting the African continent and the symbolic and practical responses of grass-roots leaders as agents of change. On the whole, the AfAA Board is pleased with the vigorous responses to our receptions and the accompanying Distinguished Lectures each year.

Status and Use of AfAA Section Communications and Publicity

The AfAA website was launched by Board member J.R. Osborn in the spring of 2007. Osborn maintains the website and keeps it updated with future plans and awards. Although he has recently assumed a faculty position at the American University of Dubai, Dr. Osborn has agreed to continue his work on the website from that location. The website contains updated Bylaws, information on current Association officers, and notices on upcoming awards and events, AfAA Section News columns from Anthropology News, and news and information submitted by AfAA members.

The website is also supported by the AfAA listserv, which allows the Board to update the general membership about AfAA events and activities. In terms of communication with the central AAA office, most events and announcements have run smoothly. We did, however, face the hurdle of a tie-breaking presidential election, which was handled both by the AAA Section Liaison’s office and through the website. Additionally, our ballot for the 2008 AfAA Board elections was subject to some sort of computer error, in which the Treasurer running for election was listed as a Secretary. This matter, which was an inadvertent error on the part of the AAA central office via its new balloting program, was quickly and efficiently rectified.
AfAA Contributing Editor Jennifer Coffman has submitted columns each month to *Anthropology News* that highlight AfAA events, members’ scholarship, and other relevant information of interest to our membership and beyond. We have developed a system by which she recruits submissions and writes the column, circulates the draft through our Board for any additions, and then officially submits the column to *AN* Editor, Dinah Winnick. This practice further demonstrates our Board members’ regular communications with one another and efforts to share pertinent information in a timely manner with our membership.

This year, we once again presented the wrist bands reading “Putting Africa Back on the Map” for sale at the AAA book exhibit location for Section publicity. Due to a signage problem, our sales were rather low this year, but they will certainly increase. We also distributed wrist bands at the AfAA Reception on a complimentary basis to new members who attended the reception and the business meetings. We have a surplus of about 100 wrist bands to recycle again in Philadelphia, but we plan to develop a new promotional series (book bags, t-shirts, and buttons) for the 2009 meetings. This plan depends upon further Board consultation and development in order to devise the most effective outreach publicity.

**Future Plans and Programmatic Suggestions**

In addition to the awards discussed at the opening of this report, the AfAA plans to offer a Distinguished Lifetime Service Award for which both US scholars and scholars from the African continent will be eligible. Granting of this award relies on the Board’s discretion as well as the availability of candidates, and it will not necessarily be offered annually. Gwendolyn Mikell received the first Distinguished Lifetime Service Award in 2007. We also plan to make minor revisions in our book award procedure. AfAA President Bennetta Jules-Rosette presented two inscribed glass Presidential awards to Board members Nancy P. Schwartz and J.R. Osborn for their exemplary service to our association. Certificates of outstanding service were also given to all AfAA Board members. These certificates and awards were given at the discretion of the AfAA President and are separate from our competitive awards.

At its 2008 Board breakfast, the AfAA Board also established a new Travel Committee to be chaired by Betty Harris. The Travel Committee will provide stipends for AfAA members-in-need participating in invited sessions and will make structured attempts at outreach toward African scholars who are already planning to attend AAA meetings. These travel stipends will be reviewed on a request and submission basis only and in no way entail a formal commitment to bring scholars from Africa or other international locations on an annual basis due to our budgetary priorities and constraints. Further details on the travel stipends will be available on the AfAA website during 2009.
In terms of Section size, the AfAA hopes that the Section Assembly will continue to develop procedures for exemption from the minimum membership requirement threshold for some of the Sections focusing on area studies or minority and marginalized populations. This membership threshold exemption may be useful to the AfAA in the future, although our current numbers are robust.

Conclusions

On balance, the AfAA is healthy and thriving. The current AfAA Board is proactive and enthusiastic. Our membership is growing, and our panels are extremely well attended. The book and paper awards have attracted a cross-section of new faculty, professional, and student members. We have voted to leave our dues configuration ($20 for the AfAA Section) stable. President-Elect Maria Cattell will assume her full duties as President of the AfAA at the end of the Philadelphia meetings in 2009. The AfAA is enthusiastic about its bright future and the exciting new awards, programs, event plans, and panels that are already in place for 2009. As stated above, we are currently one of the larger small Sections of the AAA, and during the past year, we have come a long way toward attaining our goals of heightened visibility, communication, outreach, and intellectual innovation.

Respectfully submitted,

Bennetta Jules-Rosette
President, AfAA