

**AFRICAN STUDIES LIBRARIES:
BACKGROUND TO U.S. ORGANIZATION AND INITIATIVES AND
PROSPECTS FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATIVE PROJECTS**

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The history of African studies in the United States informs any effort to build an African studies collection. The first U.S. research library collections focusing on African studies developed in the mid-twentieth century. Melville J. Herskovits, an anthropologist appointed to the Northwestern University faculty in 1927, established Northwestern's Anthropology Department in 1938 and then its Program of African Studies in 1948. When Herskovits died in 1963, Africa-related interdisciplinary research programs in the social sciences and humanities were being established at numerous universities nationwide. An even larger number of undergraduate institutions were by then beginning to offer curricular programs in African studies. All these initiatives required library support.

Very early in his career, Herskovits became aware of the lack of library holdings that could support his own Africa-based research and courses. He began to work with librarians at Northwestern University in the 1930s to systematically construct collections for Africanist scholarship. In 1954, Northwestern created the library—today known as the Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies—that has become the country's largest

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repository for the study of Africa. But Herskovits also sought to raise the issue of African collections on a national plane. His scholarly and library efforts were thus critical to the history of both African studies and African studies librarianship within the United States.

The African Studies Association (ASA) was established in New York later in March of 1957. Herskovits, the Association's founder, also served as its first president. A library committee, one of three initial standing committees, held its first meeting at the Library of Congress in June, 1958. The membership agreed to a wide-ranging agenda whose goals included the dissemination of information about the holdings of Africana collections, preparation of guides to Africa-related archival holdings, support for national bibliographies in African countries, greater acquisitions from Africa itself, and the preparation of Africa-related reference works and bibliographies. Bibliographic control for theses and dissertations related to Africa comprised another major focus.² Thus, from the field's earliest days, acquiring and providing access to the scholarly output of Africa's newly established universities, colleges, and presses were considered high priorities.

Even before Herskovits, however, Africa had comprised a central scholarly concern among historically Black institutions, often having originated with their nineteenth-century formation. This tradition, while not widely known, is also very important to the history of African studies. Historically Black institutions with longstanding focuses on African studies include Clark-Atlanta University, Dillard University, Fisk University, Howard University, Lincoln University, Talladega College, and Tuskegee University. The roster of

² A special issue of the *African Studies Review*, which focused on the 25th anniversary of the African Studies Association in 1982, contains historical essays on the development of African studies. *African Studies Review* 26:3/4 (1983).

central figures includes Ralph Bunche, W.E.B. DuBois, Charles H. Wesley, and William Leo Hansberry.³

ORGANIZATIONS

Two specialized organizations, the Africana Librarians Council (ALC) of the African Studies Association and the Cooperative Africana Microform Project (CAMP) of the Center for Research Libraries (CRL), have served as the professional focal points for Africa-related library and archival activities in the United States. While the ALC has evolved over time, it is in essence the same organization that was established in 1958 as the ASA's Library Committee. Its agenda has focused for over 45 years on coordinating and improving Africana library collections and services.

The Cooperative Africana Microform Project (CAMP) was formed about five years after the ALC, in 1963, when twelve institutions came together in order to cooperatively purchase rarely held Africana and expensive microform sets. CAMP also launched preservation microfilming projects for a wide range of archival and print materials in North America, Europe, and Africa itself. The Center for Research Libraries (CRL), in Chicago, a consortial agency dedicated to acquiring, storing, and making accessible relatively little-used research materials, was the natural home for an initiative like CAMP. CAMP, for its part, was the first of several area studies microform projects that are now associated with CRL. CAMP continues to grow in accord with its initial priorities, and its collections now include many thousands of titles.

³ Herschelle S. Chancellor, "African Studies at Historically Black Colleges and Universities," *African Issues* 30.2 (2002) 24-29. James C. McCann, "Title VI and African Studies: Prospects in a Polycentric Academic Landscape," *African Issues* 30.2 (2002) 30-36. Out of One, Many Africas; Reconstructing the Study and Meaning of Africa edited by William G. Martin and Michael O. West (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

The best way to obtain current perspectives on African studies collection development is to attend the meetings of ALC and CAMP, and to engage with the communications that take place both during and between these sessions. The ALC meets during the annual fall conference of the African Studies Association. The ALC and CAMP also meet again, on their own, in the spring. The ALC sustains standing committees for bibliography and for cataloging. Typical sessions also consider topics such as vendor relations, publishing trends, digital initiatives, and issues related to public and technical services. Meeting minutes are published in the [Africana Libraries Newsletter](#) and are also available on the ALC website. Both the ALC (www.loc.gov/rr/amed/afs/alc) and CAMP (www.crl.edu/areastudies/camp/index.htm) websites provide a great deal of information about these organizations and their work.

ALC and CAMP also maintain connections with area studies initiatives that encompass other world regions. For example, ALC and CAMP are engaged with the Association of American Universities/Association of Research Libraries "Global Resources Network" (GRN). AFRINUL, the African Newspapers Union List, is a GRN project to create a database of African newspaper holdings.⁴ ALC and CAMP also provide the context for ongoing dialog among U.S. Department of Education Title VI "National Resource Centers" for African Studies. The cooperative library projects funded through the Title VI program are planned in the context of ALC and CAMP meetings. Examples of cooperative projects undertaken with Title VI—CAMP support are found on the web at www.crl.edu/areastudies/camp/relatedprojects/t6archives.htm.

⁴ For further information see the GRN website, www.crl.edu/content.asp?11=3&12=55 and the AFRINUL website, www.crl.edu/grn/afrinul/index.asp.

ORGANIZATIONAL PUBLICATIONS AND WEBSITES

Specialist librarians must remain informed about the library-specific activities of the ALC and CAMP, and also keep current with local developments in African studies. Efforts within the African Studies Association are critical as well. ASA's annual meetings, and the Association's website, are extremely important. ASA also sustains two publications of particular interest.⁵ *ASA News*, which has been published three times a year since 1981, contains announcements, news, minutes of the ASA board meetings, and the like. ASA also publishes the semiannual *African Issues*, formerly known as *Issue: Quarterly Journal of Africanist Opinion*. *African Issues* offers in-depth looks at specific aspects of African studies.

A separate *Africana Libraries Newsletter*, which appeared in the mid-1970s, continues to this day as the primary means of printed communication for those in the United States who are interested in Africa-related library concerns. This newsletter is freely distributed beyond the ALC membership, especially to African colleagues. It has for the last few years also been available on the World Wide Web.⁶

Several websites created by individual ALC and ASA members provide a wealth of additional, up-to-date information for users, librarians, and would-be bibliographers. Karen Fung, Curator of African Collections at Stanford University, has created a website for the ASA's Information and Communications Technology Group. Joseph Caruso, African Studies Librarian at Columbia University; and Peter Limb, African Studies Bibliographer at Michigan State University, have likewise developed important sites, as

⁵ The ASA website is www.africanstudies.org.

⁶ *Africana Libraries Newsletter* can be obtained by writing to Dr. Marion Frank-Wilson, Editor, *Africana Libraries Newsletter*, Indiana University, Main Library E660, 1320 E. 10th St., Bloomington, Indiana, 47405-3907. *Africana Libraries Newsletter* is also on the web at www.indiana.edu/~libsalc/african/aln.

has Ali B. Ali-Dinar, Outreach Director at the University of Pennsylvania's African Studies Center.⁷ These websites also provide very current information about the many digital initiatives concerning resources for African studies. They are maintained on a regular basis and provide current working links.

ACQUISITIONS CHANNELS AND METHODS

Today's acquisitions environment directs most orders through established vendors. Two publications provide both general background and practical advice. Phyllis Bischof's "Publishing and the Book Trade in Sub-Saharan Africa: Trends and Issues and Their Implications for American Libraries" offers an excellent overview as of the early 1990s.⁸ A survey of vendors supplying monographs and serials from African countries to ARL libraries in the mid-1990s, including contact information, was subsequently published by the Association for Library Collections and Technical Services of the American Library Association in 1997.⁹

Over time, several vendors not based in Africa have come to the fore in supplying African research publications to American libraries. African Imprint Library Services (U.S. based) and Hogarth Representation (U.K., Canadian, and Nigerian based) are among the most prominent.

African Imprint Library Services and Hogarth Representation offer approval and blanket order plans for academic libraries. While both firms are headquartered outside of

⁷ The websites are www-sul.stanford.edu/depts/ssrg/africa, www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/indiv/africa/index.html, www.lib.msu.edu/coll/main/africana, and http://www.sas.upenn.edu/African_Studies/AS.html.

⁸ Phyllis Bischof, "Publishing and the Book Trade in Sub-Saharan Africa: Trends and Issues and Their Implications for American Libraries," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 16.6 (1991) 340-347.

⁹ *Book and Serial Vendors for Africa and the Middle East: Results of a Survey of ARL Libraries*, edited by Karl E. Debus. (Chicago: Association for Library Collections & Technical Services, American Library Association, 1997).

Africa, each relies upon agents in a variety of countries to collect materials and then supply them to library customers. Both African Imprint Library Services and Hogarth Representation offer a broad range of publications and formats including monographs, serials, government publications, NGO publications, and newspapers, as well as videos, DVDs, and CD ROMs. Librairie Africaine Soumbala offers French language materials published in Europe as well as Francophone African countries. The North American-based Bennett-Penvenne Livros also provides current and out-of-print materials from Lusophone Africa.¹⁰

The Library of Congress cooperative acquisition program is another way for academic libraries to establish a regular source of publications from selected African countries via LC's offices in Nairobi and Cairo. The Nairobi office currently provides materials from 29 countries, including the island nations off the east coast of Africa. The Cairo office, which focuses on North Africa and the Middle East, covers five African countries. Both programs offer monographs, government publications, serials, and newspapers. The websites for the two African offices more fully describe these cooperative acquisitions programs.¹¹

The African Books Collective has allowed even broader access to English-language African monograph.¹² Its purpose is to supply African books to libraries and the book trade outside of Africa. Prices are quoted in U.S. dollars or British pounds. The Collective may provide the easiest way for American and European libraries to acquire English-

¹⁰ More information about these services can be found at the following websites: African Imprint Library Services, www.africanbooks.com/ails1.htm; Hogarth Representation, www.meabooks.com, Librairie Africaine Soumbala, www.soumbala.com. Also, Bennett-Penvenne Livros, 162 Oak Street, Duxbury, Massachusetts, 02332.

¹¹ See Library of Congress Office Nairobi, www.loc.gov/acq/ovop/nairobi; Library of Congress Office Cairo, www.loc.gov/acq/ovop/cairo

¹² African Books Collective, www.africanbookscollective.com.

language books (though at present not serials or other media) published within Africa. African publishers also benefit from the hard currency income that allows continued development.

ETHICAL ISSUES

Important ethical issues confront any librarian who seeks to build collections and provide services in support of African studies. One cluster of concerns entails standards for behavior on the part of American researchers conducting field research in Africa. The “Guidelines of the African Studies Association for Ethical Conduct in Research and Projects in Africa” specifically mention library and archival research as they outline a framework for carrying out research and then depositing copies of both the data collected and resulting publications within the host country. These guidelines are available on the ASA website.¹³

The inequality of research holdings, library and archival resources, and access between the United States and Africa comprise another set of issues. How to purchase books from Africa to best benefit African publishers, and why comprehensive collections of African studies materials exist in the United States but not in Africa, are related concerns. All these issues are carefully discussed in Johannes Britz and Peter Lor’s “A Moral Reflection on the Information Flow From South to North: An African Perspective.”¹⁴

¹³ www.africanstudies.org/asa_guidelines2005.html

¹⁴ Johannes J. Britz and Peter Lor, “A Moral Reflection on the Information Flow From South to North: An African Perspective,” *Libri* 53.3 (2003) 160-173.

DIGITAL COOPERATIVE PROJECTS

Refer specifically to web resources appendix noting CAMP Timbuktu manuscript digitization project (p.2), CAMP/Title VI cooperative projects (p.2), Global Resources AFRINUL project (p.2), Southern African Freedom Struggles (p.3), and Aluka (p.3). Note the existence of other projects undertaken by only one university.

POTENTIAL FOR GERMAN / NORTH AMERICAN DIGITAL AND WEB-BASED PROJECTS

Given the extraordinary collections of African photographs held at Northwestern University and the University of Frankfurt, the complementary nature of these collections and the progress already made or underway in digitization, it would seem only natural that exploring cooperative contacts with these collections, between these universities, would be an excellent place to start. AFRINUL, from its inception, was intended to be international in scope. Building on existing GRN German-U.S. models, inviting sooner rather than later Germany participation in AFRINUL should be seriously considered. Finally, German collections could provide materials to the various Aluka projects, in particular the African Cultural Heritage Sites and Landscapes and Struggles for Freedom in Southern Africa content areas.