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President's Report at the 106<sup>th</sup> Annual Business Meeting of ASALH, Virtual  
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At this our 106th Annual Meeting, I want to say first and foremost, that we have concluded a great conference. We truly have a lot to celebrate. For over a year, we have had the stress, the loss, the pain of COVID-19 in our lives and in our society. When we met in Charleston in the fall of 2019, who would have thought that a global pandemic would alter our lives the way that it did and that it would make impossible the ability to meet in person for the next two years. Our virtual conference last year (2020) was excellent, even heroic, but in the months afterward and with people in Zoom-fatigue, the question was raised as to what would happen when the in-person contact is gone for yet another year. There is but so long one wants to talk to someone else on a computer screen. There is no chance to go off to dinner with friends, as we do in our in-person conference. And yet with the theme of the “Black Family: Representation, Identity, and Diversity,” and with the resourcefulness and perseverance of our many Black families in the past, ASALH pulled together, we kept our spirits high, and we worked hard in order to be able to say as we can say today, the ASALH conference of 2021 was one of our best attended conferences. In 2021 we far surpassed our conference registration goal because 1072 people registered.

This was indeed a family effort, but I want to thank especially the Academic Program Committee co-chairs Tara White, Shawn Alexander, and Hilary Green. And I convey my special thanks to you, Tara, because you worked with grace in the face of a personal tragedy. I want to thank Lionel Kimble and Aaisha Haykal and all the members of the Program Committee who

worked to make this conference so special. Lopez Mathews and Terrance Friday for all you did to get everything going on ASALH TV and in the Zoom virtual conference rooms, I thank you. Our videographer Ryan Heathcock produced for us a polished, super professional look for our promotional advertisements and recorded videos, which helped to attract people from all over the nation. I want to thank our Social Media gurus Zebulon Miletsky and Rose Whitehorn, who head Marketing and PR, and our Staff, Sylvia Cyrus, Crystal Boswell, Danyell Taylor, Jasmine Thomas, Shafantae Desinor And special appreciation goes to Jeff Banks and the National Conference Oversight Committee, and definitely the Florida Coalition of Branches with the regular attendance of your representatives Hazel Gillis and David Wilkins. There are so many people to thank, and I am sure I have missed some names, so I apologize. A great conference is like a great symphony with many movements and different instruments—so I thank you all-- those named and those whose names I have failed to mention. Please know all of you played a vital part in our success.

Since this is my last year as president of ASALH, I wanted to reflect a bit on our progress over the past six years. And I can proudly use the word “progress,” since we have advanced in ways that I could not have imagined when I began my first term in 2016. And let me emphasize that I sincerely mean “we”—our officers, our branches, our different Executive Council cohorts, and our members-at-large. We have taken ASALH to new heights. We didn’t do so this with everything going smoothly; and it is certainly not that we didn’t have differences. But all organizations have challenges. Members don’t always see eye to eye, and that is to be expected. And yet ASALH kept growing, kept building together, kept moving from strength to strength into the future. My two-fold vision for ASALH, when I began as president (and I have said this before), was for ASALH to become more visible and more viable financially. I want ASALH to

become a household name, to become so visible that the acronym ASALH is automatically recognized as the Association for the Study of African American Life and History. When people say the NAACP, everyone knows that organization. We still have a way to go to be known the way the NAACP is known, but we have made tremendous progress. My second vision for ASALH was that we become financially viable, that we get out from under the financial debt that we carried. We have indeed accomplished this.

Thus, I would like to reflect on our growth as an indicator of our improved visibility. We have grown as an organization over the past six years. As of December 31, 2016, according to the report of then ASALH Vice President for Membership Greer Stanford Randle, ASALH had 28 branches located in 15 states. Today, we have 47 branches in 22 states and the District of Columbia, meaning 23 locations. By late fall we are hoping to charter an additional 3 branches. Our growth has been phenomenal. At the end of 2018 the number of individuals who were members of ASALH totaled 2623 persons and by the end of this year, that number will reach over 3400 individuals. We have experienced not only growth in the number of people who are affiliated with us, but also in the number of institutions. We have today 110 Institutional members, the largest number in our history, and this impressive number in 2021 comes primarily because of our branches. ASALH branches account for bringing 79 of those 110 institutions.

In the midst of the COVID pandemic, our branches have brought unprecedented visibility to ASALH through their amazing virtual activities. I personally attended several of those activities and have more yet to attend. I want to give a special shout out to the Dr. Edna B. McKenzie Branch in Pittsburgh, the Hampton Roads Branch, the Atlanta Branch, the Heritage Branch in Philadelphia, and the Martha's Vineyard Branch, to name only a few. Your branch events have brought together in some cases people from all over the United States. The Edna

McKenzie Branch's Founders Day program featured Ida Jones, ASALH's newly elected Vice President for Membership. The event brought together a large group of people, who attended not only from Pittsburgh and the state of Pennsylvania, but from states as far away as Oregon, Massachusetts, and Florida. Ida's message on the early ASALH presidents was very informative, and she recommended an important hoped-for initiative, namely, that in the future ASALH authorized a written history of our organization.

We have formed important new Partnerships—Most recently ASALH was invited and voted into the membership of the American Council of Learned Societies. Founded in 1919, the ACLS is well-known to those of us in academia. It is comprised of scholarly organization and is considered the leading voice in support of American scholarship in the humanities and the humanistic social sciences through its scholarships and fellowships, and other activities and publications. In 2017, ASALH signed a Master Cooperative Agreement with the National Park Service and unlike our relationship with the Park Service before, ASALH was seen as a source of knowledge and research, not simply in the role of coordinating and helping with conferences. That is not to say the latter role that we played and continue to play is not important, but we are no longer passed over for research studies that go to other historical organizations. We have likewise entered into an agreement with the CESU also related to the Park Service. ASALH has a sub-contractor relationship with Howard University as part of the latter's Social Justice Consortium, which is funded by the Just Futures Grant of the Mellon Foundation. The Social Justice Workshops that have occurred for the past three Wednesdays (and which many of you have attended), represent ASALH's commitment to providing knowledge and opportunities for dialogue about social justice in our communities and not merely in academia. We have an

important partnership with New York Life related to Black families. And we are in partnership with PBS BOOKs and host joint Book Talks.

These new responsibilities and relationships have caused us to strive to be more programmatically efficient and more structurally viable, which has led to an expansion in the number of committees in national ASALH. Over the past six years, significant new committees have been added to our traditional and longtime committees. Those new committees are staffed by Executive Council members and regular ASALH members who bring their skills and expertise to our national agenda. I'd like to tell you about some of those committees that came about in the last six years:

One such committee, the National Conference Oversight Committee, was formed in 2016 to take charge of our conference in Richmond. It has been ably chaired by Executive Council member Jeff Banks year after year, and each year that Committee has worked with the Academic Program Committee and with persons from the conference host city to assure that we have a strong program and a strong financial outcome. This year, although virtual, the conference oversight committee benefitted tremendously from the coalition of ASALH's Florida branches. I want to thank the Florida members who met regularly with us during the meetings of the National Conference Oversight Committee.

The Marketing and PR Committee, while one of our longstanding committees continues its traditional work, but it has added a new social media identity, which has been especially powerful over the past two years. Also new is the SALH TV Committee, which has heightened tremendously our visibility as an organization.

The National Heritage Sites Research Committee was born out of our new relationship with the National Park Service, the CESU, and the National Park Foundation. We have a

wonderful youth scholars' project underway at present that is funded by the National Park Foundation. Finally, our Planning Committee has brought more clarity and structure to our various programs and committees through the development of clusters, an organizational chart, and organizational flow chart that must be adhered to by all committees. The new committees and subcommittees speak to our ever-growing visibility as a national organization and our decision to bring ASALH prominently into the second and now third decade of the twenty-first century.

Of critical importance as the year 2021 concludes has been ASALH's leadership transition process. We have already brought the new officers into our Executive Council committee meetings. The President-elect Marvin Dulaney participated in ASALH's first meeting with the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), and our Social Justice workshops (Howard University collaboration through the Mellon Just Futures Grant). Our Treasurer-elect Valerie Holt has already been involved in the meetings of our Audit and Finance Meeting.

ASALH is far more financially strong than when I became president in January 2016. ASALH Treasurer Gilbert Smith will tell you about this in greater detail, but I want to emphasize that our financial stability is all the more impressive because we were forced rather suddenly to take on heightened financial responsibilities when we moved from the Howard University campus to our present location in the UPO headquarters. Additionally, we were threatened like many organizations and people by the economic challenges caused by COVID. In spite of this, we continued year after year to whittle down the deficit. We were certainly helped financially by letting the University of Chicago Press manage the *Journal of African American History* on our behalf. The world can see that we still own and control the *Journal*, but its professional look, its

sales, its readership and distribution to people in the U.S. and outside—in Africa, Asia, South America—are due to the University of Chicago Press’s marketing, and also certainly due to Pero Dagbovie, the editor-in-chief to whom VP Franklin passed his brilliant baton. Revenue from the *JAAH* has surpassed the amount that was originally promised by Chicago. The *Journal of African American History* has the largest U.S. and global readership that it has ever had since its founding in 1916. That revenue helps to pay ASALH’s operating expenses. Donations are also coming to us in new ways because of our visibility and because we are able to show that we stand on a strong financial footing.

I would like to close on a personal note. When I took the helm of ASALH, becoming its president in January 2016, I did so with the knowledge that ASALH held a very special place in my heart. My father Albert N.D. Brooks worked with Carter G. Woodson beginning in the 1930s. In the dark days after Woodson death, he took on an active leadership role, becoming in 1951 the Editor of the *Negro History Bulletin* and in 1953, the Secretary-Treasurer of the Association. My father served in both capacities until his own death in 1964. I often say that I grew up in Woodson’s home, because I accompanied my father there on many a Saturday throughout the years. I came to know the two women who had worked with Dr. Woodson: Nerissa Milton and Willie Miles. I met the historians Rayford W. Logan, Charles H. Wesley, Benjamin Quarles, and John Hope Franklin. I became a historian because of ASALH. When my father died, the entire May 1964 *Negro History Bulletin* was devoted to his memory. ASALH President Charles H. Wesley praised my father for his service to the Association, stating: “It was he [Brooks] who thought out and worked the plan to finance the continuance of the Association in the days of adversity in the early fifties, and finally saw it come out of debt...., with headquarters and stocks clear of all obligations, while facing a future of meaningful

service.” Upon becoming president of ASALH, I read Wesley’s words with the feeling that they were meant to inspire me and to wish ASALH well, as we the current leaders, sought the financial resources to strengthen ASALH.

I look at the new leadership, Marvin Dulaney, Aisha Haykal, Valerie Holt, and Susan Sims Marsh, and the new EC members, with this same confidence, believing that they will take ASALH to even higher heights. I so proud to have been able to serve you as president.