

AWARDS COMMITTEE REPORT
ASALH Executive Council Meeting
Friday, February 24, 2023

Cornelius L. Bynum, Committee Chair

The Awards Committee transitioned to new leadership in January 2023 with Cornelius Bynum, Associate Professor of History and Director of African American Studies at Purdue University, stepping in as committee Chair. Despite a slow start at the outset of the year, the committee is now up to date with the committee timeline outlined the Executive Council handbook in most respects. Today's report will cover:

- I. The status of the 2023 awards nominations
- II. Recommended changes to current general nomination form and new nomination form proposals
- III. Discussion of the Council Award of Special Recognition and the V.P. Franklin Award
- IV. Scope of the Awards Committee vis-a-vie the Branch and Luminary awards

I. 2023 Award Nominations Update

There are currently two nomination submissions for the Living Legacy award (Yuri Williams submitted by Michael Dean and Tracy and Sunshine Gantt submitted by Sunshine Gantt). The Awards Committee needs EC members to encourage their professional and personal networks to submit nominations for the full slate of awards ASALH presents. The window for 2023 nominations closes March 31, 2023.

II. Recommended Changes to Current General Nomination Form and New Nomination Form Proposals

The Awards committee recommends that the Executive Council make the following changes to the current general nomination form:

- a. The nomination form clearly indicate that all nominees will be notified of their nomination upon receipt of nomination materials. The Awards Committee will not accept secret nominations. In addition to acknowledging the important work undertaken in support of Woodson's vision, ASALH awards also serve to grow organizational memberships and build audiences for annual meeting events like the awards banquet. Notifying all nominees, even those that do not ultimately receive awards, might encourage friends and family of the nominee to join the organization to support them; nominees and their supporters are further incentivized the register and attend the annual meeting. Notifying nominees also makes it possible to specifically advertise award

recipient ahead of the awards banquet that might grow attendance. Keeping nominations secret does not serve these ancillary outcomes of the nominations process. Language should be added to the current general nomination form clearly indicating that nominations cannot be made in secret.

b. The ASALH webmaster should ensure that individuals making nominations are automatically informed that their nomination materials have been received by the Award Committee.

c. The Awards Committee proposes that separate nomination form be developed for the Council Award of Special Recognition given out by the Executive Council that on the Executive Council can see. This nomination form should not be available to the public to avoid any confusion as to who makes nominations for this award.

III. Discussion of the Council Award of Special Recognition and the V.P. Franklin Award

The Award Committee proposes that the Executive Council consider and discuss specific categories of people to nominate for the Council Award of Special Recognition to determine if in both the nomination and award of this honor can facilitate greater energy, support, and attendance for the annual award banquet. How can we target this award recognition deserving individual and raise awareness around issues of teaching Black history in Florida, for example? Are there specific individuals, institutions, or organization in Florida, for instance, that we can recognize for the work they do while simultaneously pushing back on Governor Ron DeSantis' anti-Blackness politics? (What categories of people can we identify to meet these multiple goals?)

Discussion of the E.C.

The Award Committee also seeks guidance from the Executive Council on the definition and scope of the V.P. Franklin Award. The current award description states:

“V.P. Franklin Legacy Journal of African American History Award recognizes the outstanding and dedicated work and scholarship of Dr. V. P. Franklin (the JAAH editor and long-term ASALH member). Under his editorship, the JAAH was recognized as the premier academic journal in African American, African, and Diaspora Studies. Either the author/s of an article and/or ASALH members and non-members can nominate JAAH published articles for the biennial award. The first award was presented in 2022.”

Does the Executive Council want to make this an annual award or leave it as one given every other year? (Ask Executive Director Cyrus to provide background context on why this need clarification)

Discussion of the E.C.

IV. Scope of the Awards Committee vis-a-vie the Branch and Luminary Awards

The Awards Committee will not take on responsibility for the Branch and Luminary awards. The description of the Outstanding Branch Programming Award is states:

“The branch structure of ASALH reflects Carter G. Woodson’s belief that our mission, to create and disseminate knowledge about Black history, could not be realized solely by academics. He envisioned branches as a means of extending ASALH’s reach across the country and beyond. Branches collect primary materials about Black History to celebrate national and local African American achievers and local and national happenings. Invitations are extended to members and to the public to participate in theme-based events, programs and activities. Branches attend monthly membership meetings, support Annual Meeting and Conferences, and other National initiatives.”

And, the Branch of the Year Award states:

“The annual Branch of the Year Award is given to an ASALH branch whose dedication to the vision of Dr. Woodson’s desire to educate the entire community on the rich life and history of African American/Africana people is demonstrated in monthly programming, community outreach, and collaborative efforts. The Branch of the Year executes that function with intentional and conscious efforts to promote ASALH and the national programs such as the Black History Festival, National Founders Day and Woodson Birthday celebration. Through the spirit of ubuntu in the tradition of African people and in living memory of Dr. Woodson.”

In neither instance is the Awards Committee in the position to competently evaluate ASALH branches for these awards. The Award Committee is not involved in the business of the Membership Committee that oversees branches and branch activities. As such, the Award Committee is not positioned to make clear judgements about branch awards and should not take on such decisions.

Similarly, the Award Committee is not positioned to oversee the Luminary Award. The ASALH Awards page describes the Luminary Award thusly:

“The ASALH Luminary Award was established to recognize the outstanding work and contributions related to the mission and goals of ASALH, including the local branch, by a person in the locale of the annual convention. Nominees should have made significant contributions to African American history and culture with a focus on the local community where the annual meeting of ASALH is being held. Nominations must be submitted by the Local Arrangements Committee and approved by the Executive Council of ASALH. 2019 was the inaugural year for this award.”

Given that this honor is intended to recognize the contributions of people working in communities hosting ASALH's annual meeting, this award should remain with the Local Area Committee that is best positioned to evaluate deserving recipients. The Award Committee is not a suitable judge for this award since it is not engaged with the people this award is intended to honor.

This concludes the Awards Committee's 2023 annual report to the Executive Council of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History.