

**PRESIDENT'S REPORT**  
**ASALH**  
**For 12 September 2024**

In three months, I will end my term as President of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History. It has been a term of both successes and sadness.

The successes have included serving as president of the ASALH when the organization showed its resilience and took a stand by holding two successful conferences after the pandemic, one of which was in a state where our history was under attack. The successes also included starting and supporting Freedom Schools in Florida, Indiana, Illinois and Dallas in order to continue the mission of our founder, Dr. Carter G. Woodson, of promoting and teaching African American history to the nation and the global community.

Nevertheless, both conferences in Montgomery and Jacksonville attracted over 1,000 attendees. In Montgomery, after being forced to hold our conferences virtually for two years, in 2022 ASALH bounced back with a successful hybrid conference that had 1,200 participants. In 2023 in Jacksonville, we adopted the position of “running to the fight” in conjunction with our annual theme of Black Resistance and held two public programs that included a community forum about teaching African American History and a Banned Book Reading in James Weldon Johnson Park.

Of course, another success would be defeating the lawsuit filed against our organization and me by nineteen members over what the presiding judge called “petty personal politics” and dismissed the lawsuit twice for that reason. Despite this distraction that affected our relationships with some of our sponsors, ASALH has continued to attract new members and maintain the level of its membership. The names of the people who filed the lawsuit will go down in history in terms of their negative impact on our organization.<sup>1</sup> What really stands out is that they filed their lawsuit after the members of ASALH voted to affirm my retention as president and my action of returning to the Executive Council Nomination slate two people who were taken off in violation of our Constitution and Bylaws.

Nevertheless, in spite of the negative action taken by these nineteen members, ASALH has moved forward. ASALH has made Freedom Schools its signature initiative and we have countered the actions by twenty-two states to restrict the teaching of our history. Here, in Texas, for example, ASALH has worked with the African American Museum and Mount Olive Baptist Church to teach four sessions of Freedom Schools that enrolled 232 participants. The African American Museum has developed a curriculum with pedagogy instructions, student activities and historical documents that teachers as well as lay people can use to develop their own Freedom Schools.

I have also been invited by the Albertsons Social Justice Foundation to submit a grant application for funding for the Freedom Schools and/or other programs sponsored by ASALH. The grant should bring in \$25,000 to \$50,000 for programs.

Looking forward, in spite of the decision by the Edna McKenzie Branch in Pittsburgh not to support the conference, ASALH is going to Pittsburgh. The Development Committee has worked hard to reach members of the Pittsburgh community who are excited about our conference coming to Pittsburgh. We have established contacts and relationships with the Heinz History Center, Carnegie Mellon University, the University of Pittsburgh, and a variety of local organizations and people who are on the ground in Pittsburgh to assist ASALH in attracting community support. The Academic Program Committee has also put together an exciting agenda of what ASALH usually presents at its conferences: engaging plenary sessions, films, receptions, vendors, and academic sessions featuring scholars from across the country.

Continuing to look forward. Let me congratulate Dr. Kaye Whitehead for her election as the new president of ASALH, and Rev. Anita Shepherd for her election as Vice President for Membership. Let me also congratulate Sundiata Cha-Jua, Lopez Matthews and Zebulon Miletsky for their re-election to the Executive Council. I also thank Jeff Banks and Jarvis Givens for their service as they cycle off the Executive Council.

Here are some events and items for which we need to plan:

1. We need to raise funds for furniture in the Woodson House that will open in 2025.
2. We need to raise funds for outside marketing of our conference and the annual festival and luncheon. Basically, we need to incorporate this kind of fundraising in the normal operations of the Executive Council. Remember the three Gs—Give, Get or Get off!
3. We need to form a committee to plan the 110<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founding of ASALH in 2025. This committee also needs to incorporate in its planning the Centennial Celebration of Negro History Week and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Black History Month in 2026, and what ASALH will do for the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the nation in 2026.
4. I also want to bring to your attention the End of the Year Funding that ASALH will need if attendance at our conference comes up short. Please plan to work with us on Giving Tuesday as we develop a plan to reach out to branches and members.
5. We need to start planning for future conference sites.
6. Please be sure to read the fourteen changes to our By Laws that the Membership will vote on at the Annual Business meeting on September 23<sup>rd</sup>.
7. Be sure that you RSVP for the Executive Council Work session and meeting on Wednesday, September 25<sup>th</sup>.
8. Finally, we need to provide more support to the Academic Program Committee.

I still want to increase the membership of ASALH. I still want to do a Membership Campaign. (Along with this report, I am posting the Plan for 2024 that I wrote in order to do an effective membership campaign.) In fact, as I step down from the presidency, I am going to ask Dr. Whitehead to allow me to develop a membership campaign that will use my contacts and resources to recruit young people, community members and professionals in the field for ASALH.

According to the Parliamentarian the Executive Council must approve a motion to hold a virtual Business meeting on September 23, 2024. Therefore, I am offering the following motion: “The Executive Council moves to have a virtual Business meeting on September 23<sup>rd</sup> instead of its traditional face-to-face meeting.

Due to our inaction on working with our branches consistently in 2023-2024 because of the distraction of the lawsuit and general negligence, I also want to move that we suspend any action against the branches for 2024 and that the Executive Council address the status of our branches in 2025. This is consistent with the Branch Handbook – page 37. We were supposed to hold Branch Workshops at the annual conference and on specific topics regularly to assist branches. None of this was done. Thus, we cannot hold the branches to compliance this year. I recommend that the Executive Council provide robust workshops to support the branches in 2025.

**DO NOT FORGET TO REGISTER AND VOTE IN NOVEMBER!**

This ends my report. Any questions?

Attachments:

Freedom School Initiative

A Plan for 2024

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<sup>i</sup> Valerie Holt, Jarvis Givens, Barbara Dunn, Bettye Gardner, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Ronald Saunders, Lura Ball, Alonna Carter-Donaldson, Dorothy Bailey, Carl Dunn, Carlvern Dunn, V. P. Franklin, Charles Guilford, Robert Harris, Jr., Kim Jefferson, Thelma Marie Johnson, Cynthia Neverdon-Morton, Artie Travis, Rev. B. De Neice Welch,