

Townhall Response Strategy

HAITIAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION, 2021

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SUMMARY

The following is a strategic plan in response to the concerns that emerged during the Townhall Meeting on **October 10, 2020**.

The strategic plan includes:

- Creating a statement about Haitian Studies relationship to other similar interdisciplinary fields of study, namely, Black Studies, Global Studies, and Caribbean Studies
- Establishing an open-source platform of recent Haitian Studies publications
- Implementing a comprehensive mentorship program as part of emerging scholars programming
- Creating a syllabus project that fosters decolonial pedagogy on Haitian Studies
- Establishing a permanent Haiti Outreach Committee
- Implementing monthly events

Successful implementation of the strategic plan requires active collaboration between the HSA Board, committees, and the membership and sustained financial support.

BACKGROUND

International media often portrays Haiti as an ongoing crisis since its successful revolution for independence in 1804. This representation of history simultaneously fails to consider Haiti's transnational roots and global connections and how Haitians persist in their brave fight for their freedom and sovereignty. Despite the Haitian Revolution's triumph – an “unthinkable” act in the words of anthropologist/historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot – the event threatened the core of white supremacy. It resulted in dire repercussions against the new nation. In the face of “Western” critics, we aim to highlight real concerns in the country and stand in solidarity with Haiti. *Men nou la!* (We are here!)

Moments such as the current intersectional crisis oblige scholars and professionals to do more than talk or write. We are compelled to come together to think critically and productively about how theory and practice intertwine and how to incite meaningful change.

The 32nd Annual Haitian Studies Conference was an opportunity for conversations across advocacy NGOs, policymakers, and international institutions who will benefit from the reservoir of interdisciplinary knowledge that HSA has been filling for over 30 years. How did we do? How can we evaluate ourselves individually and collectively? What role should HSA be playing? How do we get there?

The Townhall provided members with an opportunity to deliberate on these urgent questions about individual, collective, and organization praxis.

The membership was organized into randomly assigned breakout rooms. Each breakout group discussed the below questions for 20 minutes and then reported back on each question individually.

1. What is Haitian Studies' relationship to Black Studies? To ethnic studies overall? Or is Haitian Studies area studies? As board member Nadège Clitandre inspires us, Haitian Studies informs *global* studies. Do we, as an association, need to come to clarity about our identity? How do we signal this to the outside world?
2. Given the changes in higher education as an institution, with the evisceration of funding exasperated by COVID, scholarly associations such as ours need to adapt quickly. What should HSA be doing? (when we get to the larger group discussion, we will be asking about how to establish priorities)
3. How does HSA facilitate truly interdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration? Does it? What can be done better?
4. How does HSA facilitate activism and real-world engagement? Does it? What can be done better? What barriers do you see to this engagement? How can we as an association overcome or undercut them?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- I. ***What is Haitian Studies' relationship to Black Studies? To ethnic studies overall? Or is Haitian Studies area studies? Do we, as an association, need to come to clarity about our identity? How do we signal this to the outside world?***

1. Center Haiti and the Caribbean in the fight against global white supremacy and anti-Blackness

2. Push Black Studies to be more diasporic and global in its approach
3. Address the linguistic limitations of Black Studies
4. Define Haitian Studies as both Black and Global Studies/Situate Haitian Studies as part of Black Atlantic Studies
5. Reckon with the institutional marginalization of Haitian Studies as well as the need to decolonize knowledge and blur disciplinary boundaries within the university

II. *Given the changes in higher education as an institution, certainly with the evisceration of funding, exasperated by COVID, scholarly associations such as ours need to adapt quickly. What should HSA be doing?*

1. Emphasis dialogue and solidarity with African Americans and Haitians in Haiti toward dismantling white supremacy and global anti-Blackness
2. Renew our commitment to scholars and students in Haiti by providing them support, acknowledgment, visibility, and space for equal participation and leadership
3. Create platforms and networks that support collaboration across national and disciplinary boundaries
4. Increase access to scholarly resources for scholars/students/activists in Haiti
5. Recognize research outside of the university, e.g., think tanks, research institutes, activist organizations, NGOs, etc.

III. *How does HSA support our members in Haiti? Does it? What can be done better?*

1. Create a committee dedicated to supporting students and scholars in Haiti with visa, conference registration, and on the ground programming (e.g., symposiums and emerging scholars' colloquia)
2. Remove financial barriers for colleagues in Haiti to become HSA members
3. Collaborate with Haitian members on translation projects and digital publications
4. Redistribute resources toward greater inclusion of colleagues in Haiti

IV. *How does HSA facilitate truly interdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration? Does it? What can be done better?*

1. Bolster interdisciplinary working sessions
2. Support the creation of interdisciplinary panels
3. Highlight the work of lesser-known Haitian Studies scholars

V. *How does HSA facilitate activism and real-world engagement? Does it? What can be done better?*

1. Highlight the contributions of activist/organic intellectuals, or what Aldon Morris has called “insurgent intellectual networks” to amplify activists and thinkers in Haiti, e.g., publishing their statements in the journal or publish interviews with them
2. Write position papers on political matters in Haiti, the US, and globally
3. Support public writing initiatives on Haiti-related issues
4. Ensure that our syllabi center Haitian texts/decolonize the syllabus

STRATEGIC PLAN

I. Create a statement about Haitian Studies’ relationship to other similar interdisciplinary fields of study, namely, Black Studies, Global Studies, and Caribbean Studies.

Response to Q1 takeaways:

The Association has not officially addressed Haitian Studies’ position within academe. We will, therefore, write a statement on Haitian Studies’ current status within the university and our vision on employing Haitian Studies methods to decolonize the university. Once the statement is ready, we will post it prominently on the HSA website.

II. Establish an open-access platform of recent Haitian Studies publications.

Response to Q2 and Q4 takeaways:

The membership noted a need to increase accessibility to Haitian Studies scholarship. With paywall barriers, accessing peer-reviewed articles often requires affiliation with university libraries or the purchasing of individual articles. For scholars in Haiti and across the global South, this situation presents a barrier to their full inclusion in the production of Haitian Studies scholarship.

We will create an open-access (OA) platform where members can share and access already-published articles. Specifically, individual scholars would need to have the appropriate permissions to share their publications within their scholarly network. We would then catalog and disseminate the publications through the OA platform hosted on the HSA website.

III. Implement a comprehensive mentorship program as part of emerging scholars' programming.

Response to Q1-Q5 takeaways:

Ongoing mentorship for emerging scholars in Haiti, the US, and abroad should be a central mission of the Association. HSA and Haitian Studies' future depends on junior scholars' professional success and ability to transform and shape existing institutions.

We will implement a mentorship series for emerging scholars (e.g., graduate students, early-career faculty, non-tenure-track faculty, etc.), which will focus on teaching, publication, activism, and public scholarship.

The Emerging Scholars' mentorship series will run from July to October and January to June.

IV. Create a Decolonizing Haiti Syllabus Project

Response to Q5 takeaways:

The Decolonizing Haiti Syllabus Project or “*Teach to Read/Read to Teach*”¹ will give emerging scholars and early career faculty the support to familiarize themselves with accessing primary, secondary, and archival sources related to Haiti. This program is to develop scholar’s awareness and access to text that are steadily becoming digitally accessible (preferably open source), build familiarity with the readings and their authors, and use these readings for research and curriculum development.

The project’s structure is as follows:

- The Needle in the Haystack - Finding Haitian Works at Academic Institutions
 - Are you using your library effectively? Members can discuss their challenges in finding materials
 - A panel of library professionals to discuss how technology redesigns are now creating opportunities in finding rare books and accessing collections
 - Familiarizing emerging scholars to Haitian-based archives
- HSA Emerging Scholars Book Club
 - Invite literary scholars and authors to introduce the reading selections and allow participating members to form small groups and choose from the selected reading.
 - Promote diversity in reading and sharing thoughts with other Haitian scholars across various disciplines.

¹ Proposal prepared by Petrouchka Moise

- Each group will tackle one book over a month to discuss a shared theme within all the various books selected. (For example, “How does this reading contribute to the decolonization of...?”)
 - Groups will reconvene at the end of the month to share their findings and experience
- From Footnote to Forefront - Developing Curriculums and Lesson Plans with Haiti as a Focus
 - From the readings of the Book Club, create a panel discussion on understanding how one reading can result in multiple teaching approaches
 - Pairing scholars to write a joint lesson plan based on all the book club readings considers decolonization of learning spaces.

V. Create a Permanent Haiti Outreach Committee

Response to Q5 takeaways:

The Haiti Outreach Ad-hoc Committee will become a permanent HSA Committee (e.g., written into the HSA by-laws). The Committee would include a handful of Haiti-based H.S.A. members, particularly those teaching at UEH.

The Outreach Committee would support scholars, activists, and artists in Haiti by :

- Facilitating membership and conference registration for Haiti-based individuals
- Co-organizing on the ground events, e.g., emerging scholar colloquia
- Facilitating visa application for Haiti-based members presenting at the annual conference

- Rebuilding and fortifying networks between scholars in Haiti and elsewhere

VI. Implement Monthly Events

Response to Q4-Q5 takeaways:

We will offer monthly events leading up to the annual conference to increase HSA's visibility and membership. The monthly events will appeal to a wide-range audience. The events will be included on an events calendar on the HSA website.

Possible events include:

- Panels/Roundtable Discussions
- Artist Talks
- Activist Panels
- Professional Workshops
- Film Screenings
- Working Session