



Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH)

Dear Branch Presidents:

At a time when there is so much dissension and so much disunity in this nation, let us be united as an organization and in our faith in one another. One of the branch presidents shared with me Daryl Scott's recent letter to you. It hurt me to read it, and it is my hope that you would not succumb to voices of anger and disruption—voices that have already caused harm and can only cause more harm to the image of ASALH. Thus I am writing to you at this time, because I do not want you to be ignorant of the truth. Nor do I want it to be said that there was no refutation to Daryl Scott's recent letter to you as Branch Presidents. That letter represents one of his many, many messages that have come in the form of email, Facebook posts, and even telephone calls to a number of people. His messages began soon after I succeeded him as president of ASALH in January 2016. Even though I had not been in office a full month, Daryl Scott wrote an email message on January 20, 2016, describing me in this way, "a president who never worked a day for ASALH before becoming president" and on his Facebook page on January 22, 2016 he wrote, "A new president who never worked an entire day for ASALH in her previous two years on the board." I need not say how thoroughly untrue those statements are. I would like to address his false claims. They are many, and thus my letter is long. Take your time to read my letter. It does not need to be read all at once.

First, contrary to Daryl Scott's accusation, there was no rushed effort to take the *Journal of African American History* to a university press, nor did the idea originate with me. The idea to do this originated with the editor of the *Journal of African American History*, V.P. Franklin himself. In several email messages to me in January 2016, Franklin requested that the Executive Council explore the possibility of going with a university press, since the present arrangement with Tapestry Press was not working satisfactorily. V.P. had already begun to reach out to presses. I took his request seriously, because V.P. Franklin has been the singular person to bring back respect and luster to the *Journal*. Daryl's messages to Franklin were even more numerous and offensive than those written in regard to me.

I will not repeat all the issues related to the publication decision and to the proposed partnership between ASALH and the University of Chicago Press, since this information was sent to you already by Sharon Harley, chair of the Publications Committee, in a document that went out to all ASALH members in November. However, I am attaching that very document in the event that you can no longer find it. From the moment that former-president Daryl Scott learned that we were looking into the mere *possibility* of partnering with a university press, he began to bombard the *Journal's* editor V.P. Franklin, the Executive Council, and me with diatribes.

I must emphasize to you that there is also no truth to his statement about my rush to sign a contract with a university press. It has taken a year of research, comparisons, deliberations, and negotiation. We received only in January 2017 the final memorandum of agreement, which our lawyers vetted carefully in regard to ASALH's interests and approved. The Executive Council

will soon vote on the agreement. Whatever the decision, there is no denying that the Publications Committee went through an exhaustive search and analysis of three highly respected presses and shared its findings step by step with the EC over multiple meetings. As you will see from the attached document from Sharon Harley, this agreement of partnership with the University of Chicago Press will bring the *Journal* to a far larger number of people than currently receive it. It will also be accessible to all members via the ASALH website, which has never been possible before. It will also go out in a printed format to all branch members and life members. You will receive the *Journal* in the mail, unless you request otherwise. And all mailing costs are absorbed by the press. In addition, the *Journal* will have a vast international reach, going into places in Africa that we could have only dreamed of in the past. This is made possible by the philanthropic program of the University of Chicago Press.

The new arrangement between ASALH and the University of Chicago will not change in any way ASALH's independent ownership and control of the *Journal*, but it will for the first time provide us with sufficient funds to pay the editor what he has requested and has been denied to date because of lack of resources on ASALH's part. It is not fair to V.P. Franklin, now on a retiree's income, to spend his own money on the *Journal*. The new press arrangement will also make possible additional funds that are sorely needed, and it will lessen the burden of responsibilities on our very small national staff. We have at present a staff of four persons, including the Executive Director.

Another point of misinformation from Daryl Scott is that the University of Chicago Press will not give us the full \$100,000 amount that we have stated is promised for the first year (the amount grows over time), since part of that money, i.e., \$45,000 of it, must be spent for the editor. This is incorrect. Scott fails to read the statement that is preceded by the asterisk under the chart in his letter to you. While acknowledging that \$45,000 could be earmarked for this purpose, the press states that "the total amount paid by UCP to ASALH may be used at the sole discretion of ASALH." This has been made clear in conversation and in writing by the press. There is no doubt that the expenditure of the total amount of \$100,000, as stipulated in the contract, is indeed the *sole discretion* of ASALH. Daryl Scott is not telling you the truth when he also states that mailing costs will come out of the \$100,000 figure. This is simply false. The contract is very clear about this matter.

Second, contrary to Daryl Scott's accusations, there was no unconstitutional action on my part, when I called "out of order" his motion to terminate our contract with the University of Chicago Press at the Business Meeting in Richmond on October 6, 2016. Afterward Daryl Scott even went so far as to write a letter to the President of the University of Chicago with this false accusation, in the hope of forcing an end to the publishing contract. He has now sent you the same falsehood. Again, my actions at the Business Meeting were in no way unconstitutional. A branch member, who is also a lawyer, spoke out at the meeting to say that we should check to see if such a vote were constitutional. I checked immediately, and learned that it was not constitutional to vote at that time. The ASALH constitution is explicit in stating that "associate members" cannot vote. There were definitely associate members in the meeting. Indeed the annual conference attracts a good number of persons who register under the status "associate member." There had been no effort to distinguish between regular members and associate members at the time that the actual vote was desired, or at any time during the Business Meeting. ASALH's Constitution is explicit: "Voting members of the Association shall consist of all

classes of membership except the *Associate Member*.” ASALH’s pro-bono lawyer has subsequently confirmed the constitutionality of my actions.

Finally, and very troubling, are the accusations made by Daryl Scott about ASALH’s Treasurer Gilbert Smith. As I have shown, Smith is not the liar here. More important, Gilbert Smith is a true professional, who brings a wholly new level of oversight to our funds. To say that our funds are now very capably managed is an understatement. Thanks to Smith, our finances have moved from a deficit, which the Executive Director projected in July to be over \$100,000 for the year 2016, to our current position in the black. Gilbert Smith’s rigorous standards of record keeping and audits are frankly new to ASALH. His expectation for the national organization is unequivocal: **we must be fiscally responsible**. He is a man admired for both his professionalism and quality of character. Thus Gilbert Smith chairs the trustee board of Shiloh Baptist Church, one of the oldest and largest black churches in Washington, D.C. It is actually quite shameful for ASALH to find itself embroiled in a conversation that disparages this Christian man. He is indeed a man of faith, one whose life exhibits integrity. I hope that you will get to meet him. You will see the true person he is.

I know that this letter has been difficult to read. I pray that you will understand my need to write it. I believe in ASALH. I believe in our branches and our scholars and the great work they do together. I ask, then, for your trust, your support, and your belief in me and the other officers. We must be united in these difficult times. Most of all, I believe in my heart that “this too shall pass” and that we will strive upward together to the magnificent heights that Carter G. Woodson dared to dream for his Association.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham".

Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham
ASALH National President