

GOING BACK TO THE FUTURE: THE AFRICAN DIASPORA IN GHANA

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I want to thank the Center for African Studies and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences for partial funding to attend the First Biennial Conference of the African Studies Association of Africa (ASAA) at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria, October 13-17.

Scholars from throughout the African Continent, Europe, the United Kingdom, the Americas, Caribbean, and Asia attended the first ever event. The opening ceremony featured several keynote speakers: former Nigerian president Olusugun Obasanjo, renowned geographer Akin Mabogunje, ASAA president Lungisile Ntsebeza (University of Cape Town), and professor Toyin Falola (University of Texas-Austin).

On the panel, “African Diaspora,” I presented the results of empirical research conducted in Ghana during my sabbatical last year. The paper was entitled, “Going Back to the Future: The African Diaspora in Ghana.” The research looks at the experiences of members of the African Diaspora who express the feeling of “returning” to Africa although most had never been to the Continent. A common theme was that moving to Africa connected them with a historical/cultural past which was

denied them through the experience of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. It is estimated that 3,000 residents from North America and the Caribbean live in Ghana. My field work included interviews with respondents from the U.S., Canada, Trinidad, and Jamaica who moved to Ghana permanently. They ranged in age from 21 to over 60, and have lived in Ghana from 6 months to over 30 years. Most had favorable experiences although they cautioned that Diasporans considering immigrating to Africa should inform themselves and prepare to adjust to differences in cultures and living conditions. Most reported that they felt their quality of life was the same or better than in their origin countries. I plan to expand my research to include Diasporans in Ghana from regions other than the Americas; and, eventually, to those living in other African countries.

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