

Joseph F. Jordan
Personal Statement for Nomination to the Board of
the Association for the Study of the
Worldwide African Diaspora (ASWAD)

I seek a seat on the ASWAD Board because I believe in and live its mission, and am proud to support its work to connect scholars, organizations and institutions across national and other boundaries and bring them into critical conversations that have been restricted in other forums. My interest in the Board reflects my own history that includes significant work focused on advancing the study of the African diaspora writ large.

My past and current work reflects my personal interest in nurturing a living and principled approach to academic/intellectual life, informed by the arts and connected to an unwavering commitment to social and political activism. Early in my career I was counseled by internationalist intellectuals and activists who encouraged me to focus on institutionalizing African diaspora studies as a critical response to the severe limitations of existing approaches to the African world. They challenged me to build organizations that would not fall victim to the poor planning, poor leadership or internal contradictions that led to the demise of others.

I took their challenge to heart and have been deeply invested in building institutions and organizations capable of advancing the field while challenging arbitrary boundaries that restrict growth. I've worked within and outside the academy as a director and/or administrator always focused on diaspora work while connecting my endeavors to the imperative to build durable institutions. Over the years I've developed or helped to establish programs for visiting scholars and artists from the diaspora and sponsored projects and fellowships that advance and support the work of faculty and students including travel and study opportunities in countries such as Cape Verde, Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, Puerto Rico the Gambia and Senegal. For the past 20 years I have been focused on curatorial work that examines the play between art(s) and politics and traditional fields in the academy and use this approach to interrogate contemporary ideas across the diaspora. In that span I planned and developed over 40 exhibitions and film festivals with artists from the U.S., the Dominican Republic, Ethiopia, Mexico, Colombia, Haiti, Morocco, Brazil, Ghana and other countries.

As an ASWAD Board member I would be interested in helping to develop the resources to sponsor these kinds of projects. I also want to work on extending ASWAD's reach to countries outside of the U.S. by examining more flexible forms of membership that acknowledge realities faced by colleagues in other parts of the world. Including a biennial art show as part of our gatherings might help us to build audiences of scholarly and activist participants beyond what might normally be seen at academic gatherings.

Since its inception ASWAD has been an inspiration to me and many like me and I am proud to be an active member. If I am fortunate enough to be selected for the Board I will serve with the same sense of mission and purpose that has guided me throughout my professional life and will work to extend the vision articulated by the founding members of the organization.