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### **U.S. AFRICAN STUDIES IN THE SHADOW OF POLITICS**

The Year 2010 marked the passage of 50 years since the Year of Africa in 1960. For the world, and especially for Africans, 2010 became the year of soccer, the year of the Cup. For Africanists in the United States, located mostly at Universities, the celebration of half-a century of African independence was clouded by concerns about the state and future development of African studies teaching and Africa research. Since 2008, the economic downturn resulted in reduced funding for academic programs in university Area Studies and foreign-language scholarship support. At the same time, the creation of AFRICOM (United States Africa Command) and emergence of the “whole-government” integrated U.S. operations policy toward Africa presented new quandaries to U.S. Africanist scholars and their professional organizations. This paper provides a brief overview of the field of African studies in the United

States over decades of development in a complex intellectual environment conditioned by domestic and international political affairs.

The theme chosen for the November 2011 African Studies Association annual meeting in Washington, DC, was ‘50 Years of African Liberation.’ The preceding year 2010 marked the 50th Anniversary of the ‘Year of Africa’ 1960. The United Nations had declared 1960 as the Year of Africa. The Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 14 December 1960. Celebrations and commemorations for what has been called “the most important year in African history” took place in 2010 around the globe, following the African diaspora and promoted by Africanists. Ironically, for many Africans on the ground, the political jubilee may have been overshadowed by international sports events taking place in Africa. The year 2010 became the year of soccer, the year of the Cup. The African Cup of Nations ended January 11, 2010 in Angola. The FIFA World Cup was played in South Africa in June and July 2010. The African Studies Association (of North America) waited until 2011 to celebrate the anniversary: the theme of the 2010 Annual Meeting was African Diaspora.’ The 2011 annual meeting of the Association was the 54<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the Association, which was started in 1956 by a small group of forward-looking academics. The creation of the association was inspired by the transition to independence of the first African countries. In 1957, Africanist scholars of the United States and Canada held the first annual meeting of their Association.

Also in 1957, the International Youth Festival convened in Moscow, USSR. In November 1957, The Soviet Union launched the Sputnik. In 1959, in Moscow, the Central Committee of the Communist Party announced, the creation of a research Institute for African Studies and in early 1960, of the first Soviet international university, to be known as the University of the Friendship of the Peoples. The Cold-War competition for the hearts and minds of Africans has begun. In 1961, the United States, whose universities of course had been open to international students all along (though not always free), established the Peace Corps for service abroad in ‘interested countries’ with the stated purpose ‘To promote world peace and friendship.’ For the rest of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, intellectual history of African studies in the United States and Russia, was

easily divided into two periods – that of the Cold War and the post-Cold War<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> I have offered a comparative perspective on Soviet and U.S. African Studies since 1960 in two recent papers: See Tolmacheva (2011) and Tolmacheva (2012).