

Welcome Speech, Arts of Survival Reception, July 7, 2016
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Welcome to IU and our School of Global and International Studies. I'm very excited to be here, helping Eileen Julian and the Institute of Advanced Studies open "Arts of Survival: Recasting Lives in African Cities." As a humanist and a humanities scholar, I deeply appreciate the value of these cross-cultural, cross-institutional exchanges, and I'm proud that our campus, tucked so far away in the state of Indiana, has the resources and talent to host them.

The fascinating program organized by Eileen Julian and James Ogude is wonderfully transnational in scope and dedicated to exploring the relations between the arts and the everyday life. By focusing on cities linked by their African roots, it implies a bold remapping of global culture and a rethinking of traditional categories of modernity, migration, and the cosmopolitan. I'm both impressed and pleased by the planners' decision to place art at the center of this discussion. When it comes to globalization, and the global refocusing of the American university, it's all too easy to think in political and economic terms, but art and artistic praxis remain central to such shifts and often represent the most dynamic and progressive edge of transnational development and dialogue.

I'm most curious, though, about how this conversation will address the ways that artistic activity charges and informs processes of urban transformation and renewal. As scholars in the humanities, we are urged from all sides to think about our work in relation to the public sphere and the common good, but such demands seem hollow without good models to back them up. As Doris Sommer argues in *The Work of Art in the World: Civic Agency and Public Humanities*, we should pay more attention to the work of civically-engaged artists. By seeing and respecting the artist as a civic organizer or catalyst, a cultural agent engaged in the remaking of public space and public life, we also find some traction for renewing the work of the humanities. Sommer's work shows us that artistic creation and scholarly inquiry lie along the same continuum. Both are animated by worldly practices of reinterpretation, remediation, recycling, and rebuilding; as a form of "cultural acupuncture," scholarship also entails an optimistic intervention in the ways communities imagine themselves and their resources. Similarly, Sommer's work focuses on often overlooked spaces and practices from around the world; artistically-driven community projects from South America, Africa, and Eastern Europe. When it comes to publicly-active arts and humanities, this is where the action is today, and this summer institute, with its emphasis on Post-Catastrophe environments and efforts to rebuild them, similarly seems poised to bust up the usual discussions, provide new models, and change the way we think about the relations between arts, scholarship, and the possibilities of place.

This summer institute also marks a great step forward for our Institute of Advanced Study, which has been quickly reclaiming its former glory under Eileen's leadership. The scholars here come from an great range of fields, including anthropology, literature, performance, film and media studies, gender and women's studies, history, art history, urban studies, Arabic, and French, and, of course, Africana studies. The program will go a long way toward showing our campus what an Institute of this sort could and should accomplish when it's devoted to contemporary projects that demand multiple bodies of knowledge and methods of approach. At the same time, the summer institute speaks to our campus's many, many strengths in African and African-American studies. IU houses a wealth of Africana resources in the Archives of Traditional Music, the Black Film Center and Archive, the Eskenazi Museum of Art, the Lilly Library, the Mathers Museum of World Cultures, the Wells Library, and other repositories. We are also the proud home of the African-American African Diaspora Studies Department, the African American Arts Institute, and the Neal Marshall Black Cultural Center. And, of course, there are no finer campus performing arts groups than our own IU Soul Revue, the African American Dance Company, and the African American Choral Ensemble.

Most of all, though, we want you to feel welcome on our campus. Relax. Enjoy yourself. Ask questions. Ask anything. It's a beautiful place, and you're in good hands. Eileen is an excellent host. Costume exhibits, film screenings, a trip to New Orleans – you can't beat that. So on behalf of the Office of the Provost for Research, the Vice Provost Rick van Kooten, and our staff, welcome to IU.