

**Remarks by Ambassador Marcia Bernicat
February 11, 2011
Pikine Cultural Center
Black History Month Event with
Paul Miller, a.k.a. DJ Spooky**

Papa Sagna Mbaye, Mayor of Pikine

Fatou Bineta Dieng Cisse, Director of the Leopold Sedar Senghor Cultural Center of Pikine

Invited guests,

It's a great pleasure for me to be here with you tonight. This is my first visit to the Leopold Sedar Senghor Cultural Center in Pikine and I am very impressed by the variety of activities and services available here. I know that the Center hosts exhibits by a variety of visual artists; there is a dance rehearsal space; a well-stocked library; the Africulturban offices promote hip hop music; and Radio OxyJeune broadcasts reach approximately 1.5 million people per day. Maintaining this level of activity is a challenge, and I congratulate Mrs. Cisse for her hard work.

I am thrilled to see your emphasis on activities for Senegalese youth. That is exactly why we chose to bring Paul D. Miller – a young, cutting-edge author and multi-media artist from New York – to Pikine to celebrate Black History Month with you.

Each February in the United States, we pause to reflect on the major contributions of African Americans to our culture, economy, political life, and society. Paul is a great example of one such American. He has recently edited the book *Sound Unbound*, which he'll speak about tonight.

I'm excited to experience firsthand Paul's passion for combining visual and audio arts in new and imaginative ways. His creative process uses modern technology to revive and preserve the works of earlier artists and writers in a way that entices us to exchange ideas on important 21st century social issues. Prepare yourselves as he inspires us to look differently at both art and modern technology, and think of ways in which we can combine the two to showcase cultural values.

Earlier this month, President Obama released his "Presidential Proclamation" for National African American History Month. The Proclamation focused on the extraordinary efforts of African Americans to achieve equality. As President Obama said, "for centuries, African American men and women have persevered to enrich our national life and bend the arc of history toward justice. From resolute Revolutionary War soldiers fighting for liberty, to the hardworking students of today reaching for horizons their ancestors could only have imagined, African Americans have strengthened our Nation by leading reforms, overcoming obstacles, and breaking down barriers."

Thank you for joining us as we celebrate with President Obama all the contributions that African Americans have made to our Nation's history and identity.

I am personally proud to recognize the progress that our country has made in reaching the goal our founders embraced: liberty and justice for all. As President Obama made clear, it is a "progress won by the tears and toil of our predecessors." However, we recognize that "barriers still remain on the road to equal opportunity." We acknowledge that we are a work in progress.

To overcome these barriers, we are focused on giving our children – all of our children – a sound education. As President Obama stressed, "knowledge is our strongest tool against injustice, and it is our responsibility to empower every child in America with a world-class education from cradle to career. We must continue to build on our Nation's foundation of freedom and ensure equal opportunity, economic security, and civil rights for all Americans.

During National African American History Month, we recognize the extraordinary achievements of African Americans and their essential role in shaping the story of America. In honor of their courage and contributions, let us resolve to carry forward together the promise of America for our children."

President Obama, in speaking these words, expressed our wish for the United States of America and for all of the world's citizens, but it is our wish for Senegal. And tonight, in this space which encourages youth to learn, share, and be creative, we will share that wish in a new way.

Tonight you will see an example of our nation's lively intellectual life, of which young African Americans are so often at the forefront. Paul's emphasis on cultural introspection through popular music is a perfect example of how in a democracy, encouraging free expression, promoting civil society participation and community involvement is, simply put, what we do.

So now, without further ado, I'll turn the program over to Paul to show us what this new form of expression is all about.

Thank you.